

# International Journal for Religious Freedom (IJRF)

## Journal of the International Institute for Religious Freedom

IJRF is the journal of the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF). It is published bi-annually and aims to provide a platform for scholarly discourse on the issue of religious freedom in general and the persecution of Christians in particular. It is an interdisciplinary, international, peer reviewed, scholarly journal, serving the interests of religious freedom and contains research articles, documentation, book reviews and academic news on the issue. The editors welcome the submission of any item that could contribute to the journal.

Manuscripts submitted for publication are assessed by a panel of referees and the decision to publish is dependent on these referees' reports.

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<b>Book Review Editor</b>	Dr Byeong Hei Jun	<a href="mailto:bookreviews@iirf.eu">bookreviews@iirf.eu</a>

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## International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) of the World Evangelical Alliance

Friedrichstr. 38 2nd Floor 53111 Bonn <b>Germany</b> <a href="mailto:Bonn@iirf.eu">Bonn@iirf.eu</a>	PO Box 535 Edgemead 7407 Cape Town <b>South Africa</b> <a href="mailto:CapeTown@iirf.eu">CapeTown@iirf.eu</a>	32, Ebenezer Place Dehiwela (Colombo) <b>Sri Lanka</b> <a href="mailto:Colombo@iirf.eu">Colombo@iirf.eu</a>
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# International Journal for Religious Freedom

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## **Note to librarians**

2009 carries the first full volume of IJRF. There was only one issue in 2008, as the pilot issue appeared late in the year.

## **Cover art**

Jesus asked his disciples to wake and pray with him in Gethsemane before his impending arrest and suffering, but they fell asleep. Christians today might face the same challenge regarding their solidarity with those facing religious persecution. The illustration on the cover is taken from the Gethsemane scene, enacted by the Mafa people, a north Camerounian ethnic group, and painted by an anonymous French artist.

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# Editorial

This issue of the *International Journal for Religious Freedom* was born in the tension between a lot of excitement and deep pain. That is true both on a global as well as on a personal level. The editors, staff, associates of the International Institute for Religious Freedom, and the authors of this *IJRF* issue have had many opportunities to contribute to the upholding of religious freedom, some of which are reflected in this journal. However, researching and documenting the abuse of human beings and the restriction or denial of their religious freedom, do not pass lightly. Some of us have seen moments of breakthrough and triumph as well as various degrees of personal suffering.

The executive editor of *IJRF*, Dr Mirjam Scarborough, has bravely given her best to conceptualise and edit this issue, until the discovery of a chronic life-threatening illness and the necessary treatment which eventually forced her to leave the completion to her colleagues. We pray for her full recovery by God's grace. Please be lenient with us if you find that the editing has not reached the standard that it should, in our effort to get the journal to you.

In the beginning of this issue, *we introduce* the Religious Liberty Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance under the leadership of Godfrey Yogarajah who is also maintaining an office of IIRF in Sri Lanka. The brilliant arguments of Thomas K Johnson, elicited by reactions to the recent ban of minarets in Switzerland, make a short *opinion piece*. A second one by Richard Howell from India extensively reflects on a proper Christian interpretation of and reaction to suffering and martyrdom.

The range of *academic articles* is opened by Sri Lankan lawyer Roshini Wickremesinhe, who analyses the role of government and judicial action in defining religious freedom, using her country as a case study. Christof Sauer examines data on religious persecution in contexts where Christians and Muslims are living together. This article was occasioned by a conference on xenophobia in South Africa which was sponsored by the embassy of a Muslim country.

Following these articles, Thomas Schirmacher discusses the relationship of Evangelicals and Christianity to modern democracy. This originally appeared in a widely circulated publication of the German federal parliament, where an evangelical scholar was given the unique opportunity to contribute after Evangelicals had been heavily maligned as a threat to democracy.

Charles L Tieszen contributes his third and final piece on persecution, this time analysing proper Christian responses to persecution. Unfortunately, for the time being, Glenn M Penner will be unable to continue his *series* on a biblical theology of persecution and discipleship due to a very serious illness, unless a miracle occurs. Some of his efforts at revising his theology can be found on <http://theologyofpersecution.blogspot.com>.

As usual *IJRF* also contains a number of items beyond the strictly academic articles. Mirjam Scarborough has conducted an *interview* with Elizabeth Ton from Romania, because we were impressed by the spirituality with which she has responded to persecution. However, due to her illness Mirjam Scarborough was unable to complete her *event report* on the Bad Urach Consultation organised by the IIRF in September. Its place is taken by a short press release. Michael Hausin extensively analyses new efforts to unite in advocacy for religious freedom in Germany at a congress held in November. We document the Schwäbisch Gmünd Call for religious freedom emanating from that congress, as well as the call to action and prayer for Orissa by the Religious Liberty Partnership. The extensive questionnaire covering possible dimensions of religious freedom in Paul A Marshall's *Religious Freedom in the World* seems such a useful tool in compiling country profiles that we have reproduced it.

*Noteworthy* items have again been compiled by Dr Byeong Hei Jun, whom we also warmly welcome as the editor of *book reviews*. In both those sections particularly note the new world wide protest against apostasy laws in the Muslim world and publications concerning freedom to believe for Muslims who leave Islam.

Please note the *deadlines* for the submission of major articles for the two annual issues of *IJRF*: 1 February and 1 August respectively and a month later for smaller items such as book reviews, noteworthy items and event reports. We are looking forward to your contributions and subscriptions. Please recommend *IJRF* to your friends and libraries. It is also available free ofcharge online at [www.iirf.eu](http://www.iirf.eu).

Yours for religious freedom

*Dr Christof Sauer*

*on behalf of Dr Mirjam Scarborough and Prof Dr mult Thomas Schirrmacher*

## We Introduce ...

This rubric provides a platform for organisations working in the area of religious liberty to introduce themselves. In this way the editors seek to raise among our readership awareness of and appreciation for the various players in the field, in the hope so to ultimately serve the persecuted. In this issue we introduce the Religious Liberty Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance (RLC). In October 2008 its new executive director Godfrey Yogarajah was induced. [MS]

## Religious Liberty Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance

### Vision, mission and aim

It is the vision of the RLC to promote religious freedom world-wide, to be the voice of the voiceless, and to create a climate where individuals can exercise their faith without fear of oppression or discrimination. It is the mission of the RLC to serve as a coordinating and networking team within the international political and advocacy communities that can effectively serve evangelicals who are being persecuted, harassed and oppressed because of their faith; and to do this primarily by responding and partnering with WEA member organisations. The goal is to strengthen the local church's ability to express their faith by promoting a freer religious, social and political environment in their nation and throughout the world, and to equip church leaders in dealing with government. Some of the strengths of the RLC are its global presence through the Alliances worldwide, its neutral networking capacity, good information and strategic communication. The RLC has credibility and respect and carries a global voice and identity. The RLC maintains a presence at the United Nations and cooperates with affiliates such as IIRF, First Step Forum, Religious Liberty Partnership, and Christian Post etc.

### Core activities

There are three broad areas the RLC is focusing on. It aims to:

#### 1. Educate

National and Regional Alliances and National Partners will be trained in the areas of: (i) establishing a religious liberty commission; (ii) helping the church to prepare for persecution and withstand persecution; (iii) advocacy training (iv) biblical theology of persecution and discipleship. The RLC will attempt to establish some of these as a part of the curricula

of Bible Colleges and Seminaries. There will also be other practical aspects of training such as documentation, monitoring, legal rights, code of conduct etc.

## **2. Expose**

The RLC seeks to monitor, document and have a systematic data base on religious persecution world wide. This serves to effectively disseminate information for prayer (among others through the International Day of Prayer), for advocacy and lobbying, including press statements, embassy briefs, briefs to governments, and institutions. The RLC offers the Religious liberty e-mail information service, Religious liberty prayer network, Religious liberty research and analysis, and cooperates with media networks.

## **3. Encourage**

The RLC seeks to support mechanism to help assist persecuted churches, those facing legal challenges and Christians in prisons and families of martyrs. The cultivation of prayer and intercessions are also considered means of encouragement. The RLC at times engages in site visits and first hand information gathering, pastoral care and psychosocial intervention where necessary, and is undertaking research and analysis.

## **Means of implementation**

1. The RLC seeks to re-activate its Advocacy Task Force on religious liberty violations that was established in 1992. This focuses primarily on evangelicals, actively liaises and coordinates with other concerned bodies to respond to specific religious liberty cases.
2. The RLC bi-annually presents a Religious Liberty Award to an evangelical advocate of religious liberty, or an evangelical who has suffered persecution for their faith.
3. The RLC plans to publish a bi-annual Religious Liberty Report of books or papers, detailing the issues of religious liberty in selected key countries in consultation with local church leadership and main agencies working in the area of religious liberty and human rights, as well as key reference works.
4. An international Legal Task Force is organised to provide legal counsel and services to evangelicals persecuted for their faith. Advocates International is already a part of WEA and fulfills the



same function at local level in countries where advocacy groups exist. Among others a compilation, in English, of sections and interpretations of constitutions or legal documents dealing with religious freedoms from key countries is made and periodically updated.

5. Regional and National Evangelical Alliances are encouraged and assisted in organising their Religious Liberty Commissions to mobilise their constituency for religious liberty, where this is not yet the case.
6. A worldwide prayer network is coordinated on behalf of specific religious liberty cases around the world in cooperation with existing networks.
7. A Governmental Relations Task Force shall be established to encourage national and regional WEA fellowships to organise offices of governmental relations.

Contact: Godfrey Yogarajah via email at: [wearlc@sltnet.lk](mailto:wearlc@sltnet.lk)

[www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc/](http://www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc/)

## Thinking twice about the minaret ban in Switzerland

Thomas K. Johnson\*

**Keywords** minaret, Switzerland, Turkey, natural moral law, clash of civilisations

In the last few days we have begun to hear the various international protests against the actions of Swiss voters, to not allow the construction of future minarets in their small alpine nation. Very few thoughtful readers should be surprised that *Aljazeera* is complaining about ‘intolerance,’ ‘extreme Islamophobia,’ and ‘religious hatred.’ In this context, *Aljazeera* seems to agree with Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, the secretary general of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, who called the ban an “example of growing anti-Islamic incitement in Europe by the extremist, anti-immigrant, xenophobic, racist, scare-mongering ultra-right politicians who reign over common sense, wisdom and universal values.”<sup>1</sup> Prime Minister Erdogan of Turkey has been quoted as saying that religious minorities in Turkey (who are often Christians) enjoy greater liberties than religious minorities in Switzerland (who are often Muslims).<sup>2</sup> And the claims that the Swiss referendum violates the European Convention on Human Rights as well as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights have not been surprising. Are we entering a new phase in the so-called “Clash of Civilizations?”

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\* Thomas K. Johnson (\*1954), resides in Prague and is an Academic Advisor of the International Institute for Religious Freedom of the World Evangelical Alliance ([www.iirf.eu](http://www.iirf.eu)); Vice President for Research, Martin Bucer Seminary and Research Institutes ([www.bucer.eu](http://www.bucer.eu)); IICS Professor of Theology, Philosophy, and Public Policy ([www.iics.com](http://www.iics.com)). He holds a PhD in Ethics and Philosophical Theology from the University of Iowa. He is the author of *Natural Law Ethics: An Evangelical Proposal* (Bonn 2005), *Human Rights: A Christian Primer* (Bonn 2008), and *What Difference Does the Trinity Make? A Complete Faith, Life, and Worldview* (Bonn 2009). The author writes in American English. E-mail: [johnson.thomas.k@gmail.com](mailto:johnson.thomas.k@gmail.com).

<sup>1</sup> <http://tinyurl.com/aljaz09>; home: [www.aljazeera.net](http://www.aljazeera.net).

<sup>2</sup> <http://tinyurl.com/spiegel09>; home: [www.spiegel.de](http://www.spiegel.de).

To think twice about this debate and reduce the clash of civilizations we must notice that *all* the critics of the Swiss voters appeal in a significant manner to universal values or global standards of human behavior. Whether this appeal is to a written code (in the form of a human rights declaration) or is made by comparing the actions of Turkey and Switzerland or is to a less precise notion of universal values, all the parties in the debate want to criticize our Swiss neighbors on the basis of global human values or a universal moral law that should rule over our political decisions. It seems that our Muslim neighbors and our secularist neighbors agree with each other that there is a universal standard of human behavior that is independent of our religious and political loyalties, and that we can expect all reasonable people to know this universal standard. This is important. It is a crucial step away from the clash of civilizations.

In the Christian tradition we have often called these universal values or global standards of human behavior ‘the natural moral law.’ Christians, whether Catholic or Protestant, have usually claimed that all sensible people (those who are not psychopaths) know a significant amount about right and wrong, and that this knowledge is a gift of God to all people, regardless of their religion or philosophy of life. This moral knowledge is an important part of what makes a humane civilization possible and this moral knowledge coming from the natural moral law should be central to public, political life together. As Christians, we think that our more distinctly religious morality (which comes from the Bible) is consistent with the more general moral values of the natural moral law, if they are both properly interpreted, but that the moral values and principles for public, political life are not narrowly religious. In a debate like the one raised by our Swiss and our Muslim neighbors, we Christians should assume that all normal people know a lot about basic moral values and principles such as justice, fairness, and honesty.

In any serious debate, one of our first questions is *always* whether or not the other party really believes what they claim to believe. “Do they really believe their own words?” The only solution is to ask people, whose religious, philosophical, or political loyalties may be very different from our own, to act like they honestly believe their own words. The Muslim organizations and states have asked the Swiss voters and the Swiss government to act like they believe their own words, words which are contained in the Swiss constitution and

the global human rights declarations. Now the international community must also ask the Muslim organizations and states to act like they believe their own words. This means allowing real and substantial freedom of religion for minorities in the countries that are officially or substantially Muslim.

I am glad our Muslims neighbors are complaining that they are not allowed to build minarets in Switzerland. Apparently they believe in the moral principle of freedom of religion. I believe that allowing other people to formulate their own deepest convictions and then to express those religious/philosophical convictions within a religious community or institution is a fundamental principle of justice, properly recognized as a basic human right. On the basis of the moral/legal principles now recognized and articulated by our Muslim friends, we can now ask them to allow real and substantial freedom of religion for religious minorities in places like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Malaysia, Turkey, Jordan, and Morocco. At the very least, freedom of religion requires allowing people to choose or change their religion, according to their own principles, without legal punishment. And groups of Christians should be allowed, according to the recently articulated Muslim principles, to build church buildings with real steeples in Muslim countries, if Muslims in Switzerland should be allowed to build minarets.

Because this is truly a serious debate, one of my first questions is whether or not the other parties in the debate really believe their own words. After the recent execution of Ehsan Fattahian in Iran, simply because he converted from Islam to Christianity, we need to ask our Muslim neighbors if they really believe their own words about demanding freedom of religion. Our Muslim neighbors should have been more outraged because this execution than because of the fact that they cannot build minarets in Switzerland right now. I profoundly hope that real freedom of religion for all people in all countries can be both affirmed and practised. This is a step toward justice and a step back from a clash of civilizations.

# Christian suffering and martyrdom: An opportunity for forgiveness and reconciliation

Richard Howell\*

## Abstract

Dealing with the recent killings of Christians in Orissa, the Indian author maintains that forgiveness and reconciliation are proper Christian responses to suffering and martyrdom. The Early Church lived this by God's superhuman power and was marked by holiness. Unfortunately, from the time of the medieval church a merger between violence and holiness has led to crusades, post-Reformation religious wars, the Conquista in Latin America and the shedding of blood of Christians by Christians eg. in Rwanda. However, there were Christians strongly objecting this. A brief survey of other religions also shows a merger between violence and holiness. Christians must not let evil succeed by responding with violence and retribution but must try to overcome evil with good by letting the cross of Christ shape their relationships with others. How should the Church remember and respond to the suffering experienced? The memories must be interpreted within the Christian world view, the wrongdoing must be publicly and truthfully remembered, condemned and forgiven. In the battle against evil, even against evil in one's own culture, the Church needs inter-church community.

**Keywords** Forgiveness, reconciliation, suffering, martyrdom, violence, remembrance, Orissa, India.

The Church is called by God to witness to the gospel of forgiveness and reconciliation even in the face of suffering and martyrdom. It is imperative that the Church's response to violence is formulated in the light of Jesus' response to his cruel and barbaric crucifixion, designed by the Roman authorities as a deterrent for all to see and be warned. In the midst of this awful experience and extreme situation Jesus demonstrates love for his enemies. He offers forgiveness to those responsible for his execution (Luke 23:34). The Church is redeemed

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\* Dr Richard Howell (\*1953) of New Delhi/India, was the co-convenor of the Bad Urach Consultation "Developing an evangelical theology of suffering, persecution and martyrdom" held on 16-18 September 2009 in Germany, where he presented this paper. He is the General Secretary of the Asia Evangelical Alliance (AEA) and of the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI). He is a member of the Global Christian Forum (GCF) and was principal of the Allahabad Bible Seminary in Uttar Pradesh, India, from 1990 to 1996. He holds an MA and BD from India, a ThM from Canada and a PhD from Holland. E-mail: efi@swissmail.org.

by God who in Christ dies for the redemption of the ungodly. The message of the cross then is that when we serve and even suffer for others, we are in the company of Jesus Christ. The cross opens us to grace giving us the kind of love Christ showed when he washed the disciples' feet and cared for the unlovable and died for the ungodly.

How was this model of Christ pursued or neglected in church history?

## **Obedience to Christ**

The emphasis in the early Church was that every Christian should live in obedience to Christ. Clement (A.D. 30-100) gives the examples of the martyrdom of Peter and Paul "who spent their lives in the practice of holiness" and urges Christians "to give up vain and fruitless cares, and approach to the glorious and venerable rule of our holy calling" (Donalds & Robertson 1985:15).

The "Letter to Diognetus," was written by an anonymous apologist (about 129) to present a case for Christianity. The argument is set in the context of the transcendent God who made himself known in history in the person of Jesus Christ, 'destroying the divinities of human imagination'. The character of Christian life is a primary piece of evidence for the supernatural basis of Christian religion. 'Christians are different and mysterious, because they live by a superhuman power.' Christian faith brings vitality and grace and love to a world full of hatred. This illustrates the early church's conviction that every believer is so to live in obedience to Christ that others, seeing their exemplary lives, will want to follow Christ also (Letter to Diognetus:205-224).

In the Christian tradition, Cecilia was the daughter of a noble Roman family, and was the only Christian of her family, who lived during the reign of the emperor Septimus Severus (A.D. 193-211). She suffered martyrdom for her absolute devotion to Christ. Now in the catacomb of Rome lies her statue, on one hand she had three fingers outstretched and on the other hand just one finger, denoting her belief in the triune God.

In 284 when Diocletian became Roman Emperor the persecution of Christians intensified. Though Christians never presented a political problem to the state, for they remained aloof from politics to a

remarkable degree, the church was rapidly growing in numbers and strength. Two options were available to the ruler, either to force submission and break its power, or to enter into alliance with it and thus secure political control of the growing church. The latter as we will see later was adopted by Constantine; the former was adopted by Diocletian. The growth of Christianity was perceived as a threat and thus united worshippers of local deities against it, while Diocletian was disposed to emperor-worship and the service of old gods. Diocletian moved cautiously. He first got rid of Christians in the army and then the imperial service of Christians, beginning in February 303, by three great edicts of persecution in rapid succession. Churches were ordered destroyed, sacred books taken away; church leaders imprisoned and forced to sacrifice by torture. In 304 a fourth edict required all Christians to offer sacrifices. It was a time of intense persecution. There were many martyrs and many who gave up their faith (Walker 1970: 100).

How then did the Gospel spread to every corner of the Roman Empire within two centuries? The Christians were ablaze with the power of the risen Christ, the threats of persecution did not dampen down their passion to spread the gospel. The first great church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (260-340) wrote that many unnamed charismatic evangelists travelled widely, “scattering the saving seeds of the kingdom of heaven far and wide throughout the whole world... a great many marvellous miracles of divine spirit were still being worked by them” (Thomas 1995:4-7).

Mission for most Christians in the early Church was defined primarily in terms of being rather than doing. This became a recurring theme of Orthodox mission theology.

In his book *The Rise of Christianity* American sociologist Rodney Stark writes: “The total number of Christians martyred by the Romans probably was fewer than a thousand. But their steadfastness greatly strengthened the faith of other Christians and impressed many pagans” (Stark 1997:164). He documents how the church lived during the first three centuries of the Christian era in the Roman Empire. Abortion, infanticide, adultery, demeaning treatment of women and plague were all common in the Roman Empire, with negative consequences on the Empire. The Roman population barely reproduced itself because of frequent abortions. Female infanticide

produced a serious shortage of women for marriage. Adultery, abortion, and forced pre-adolescent marriage destroyed the fertility of many women. Plagues killed a high percentage of the population. Stark demonstrates that Roman Christians behaved differently. They did not practise abortion. They treated women with dignity and respect and cared for others instead of fleeing when plagues hit. The impact was tremendous. The Emperor Constantine legalised Christianity in AD 313. Stark writes: “Rather than cause of triumph of Christianity, the emperor Constantine’s “Edict of Milan” was an astute response to rapid Christian growth that had actually made them a major political force” (:2). Unfortunately making Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire weakened the faithfulness of the Christian community by bringing in people who did not really believe or had a weaker belief.

## **Merger between violence and holiness**

The crusades are the most obvious example of the merger between violence and holiness which took place in the medieval Church. Catholic Popes combined religious authority and political power for centuries. The crusades beginning from 1096 which dominated the life of both the Church and state in Western Europe for over two centuries, had their roots in the teaching of Gregory the Great that it was the duty of Christian rulers to defend and extend the Christian faith. Since salvation came by obedience and participation in the life of the Church, conversion by force seemed logical. In 1095 Pope Urban II (Riley-Smith 1981:37-40) urged his listeners to undertake a holy war to free the Holy Land from pagan control. The appeal succeeded, and the first crusade was launched. The crusades were a tragic distortion of Christian mission, for which the Church is still criticised.

However the early 13th-century friar Francis of Assisi joined the Fifth Crusade not as a warrior but as a peacemaker. He was not amused by the Crusaders, whose sacrilegious brutality horrified him. In his view, judgment was the exclusive province of the all-merciful God; it was none of a Christian’s concern. True Christians were to befriend all yet condemn no one. Give to others, and it shall be given to you, forgive and you shall be forgiven, was Francis’ constant preaching. Francis sailed across the Mediterranean to the Egyptian court of al-Malik al-Kamil, nephew of the great Saladin who had



defeated the forces of the hapless Third Crusade. Francis was admitted to the august presence of the sultan himself and spoke to him of Christ. Francis went back to the Crusader camp on the Egyptian shore and desperately tried to convince Cardinal Pelagius Galvani, whom Pope Honorius III had put in charge of the Crusade, that he should make peace with the sultan, who, despite far greater force on his side, was all too ready to do so. But the cardinal had dreams of military glory and would not listen. His eventual failure, amid terrible loss of life, brought the age of the crusades to its inglorious end (Cahill 2006). Donald Spoto, Francis of Assisi's recent biographer, accurately calls Francis "the first person from the West to travel to another continent with the revolutionary idea of peacemaking."

Another dissenting voice against crusades was that of Ramon Lull who in the early 14th century visited North Africa on an investigation mission for a crusade being planned by the Pope. He returned in 1308, reporting that the conquest should be achieved through prayer, not through military force (Ramon Lull).

The comments of Scott Peck on the nature of crusades are wisely stated:

Crusades and inquisitions have nothing to do with Christ. War, torture, and persecution have nothing to do with Christ. Arrogance and revenge have nothing to do with Christ. When he gave his one recorded sermon, the first words out of Jesus' mouth were, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' Not the arrogant. And as he was dying he asked that his murderers be forgiven (Peck 1983:11).

The religious wars that followed the Reformation were some of the most violent in all of European history. The Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) was initially fought largely as a religious conflict between Protestants and Catholics in the Holy Roman Empire, although disputes over the internal politics and balance of power within the Empire played a significant part. Walker writes:

Little evidence of spiritual life was manifested in this frightful time of war; yet to it, in large part, and reflecting the trust of heartfelt piety in its stress, belongs the work of perhaps the greatest of Lutheran hymn-writers, Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676). In its earlier years, also, lie the chief activities of that strange and deep Protestant mystic, Jakob Böhme (1575-1624), of Görlitz (Walker 1970:396).

The Roman Catholic mission in the sixteenth century continued many of the characteristics of the crusades especially in Latin America. The Society of Jesus saw itself as an army whose members were soldiers of God. They vowed to fight under the direction of the pope for the good of souls, and the propagation of faith in whatever countries he might wish to send them. The order produced some of the most attractive and effective missionaries, among them, Xavier, who wished to “bring natives into the fold of Jesus Christ” (Thomas 1995:29). The tragic side of Roman Catholic mission in this period was seen in the colonisation of Latin America, with mass baptisms, exploitation, and often extermination of the native populations.

But why is religious language exploited by people betrothed to inhuman violent struggles? Mark Juergensmeyer observes, “By identifying an earthly worldly struggle with the cosmic struggle of order and disorder, good and evil, light and darkness, justice and injustice, political actors and religious leaders utilize the readily available way of thinking that justifies the use of violent means” (Juergensmeyer 1991:386). The social scientists research to discover primarily the social and political aspects of the problem, but as Juergensmeyer states some ‘have tried to trace the patterns in religion’s own logic’. David Rapoport (1984:658-77), for instance ‘has identified several features of Messianic movements that he believes lead to violence, most of which are characterise by a desire for an antinomian liberation from oppression.’

For religious language to lead to violence it is essential for the pious to believe that the cosmic struggle is realizable in human terms. Juergensmeyer writes:

If the war between good and evil, order and chaos, is conceived as taking place in historical time, in a real geographical location, and among actual contestants, it is more likely that those who are prone to violent acts will associate religion with their struggles (Juergensmeyer 1991:386).

With millions of Christians killing Christians in Europe and not so long ago in Rwanda and Kenya in Africa and also in India in Asia, history shows much blood of Christians has been shed by Christians. However both sides of confessing Christians consider their dead as martyrs and the others as perpetrators of crime. Can such killings be considered martyrdom?

## Merger between violence and holiness in other religions

Democratising societies in Asia and Africa display a disturbing common tendency towards ethnic and religious violence. The reason is simple. As societies open up and politicians scramble for power, they appeal to the public for votes using what ends up being the most direct, effective religious language, which cements group solidarity in opposition to some other group. Religious language is most effective in adding fuel to the fires of ethnic or religious conflict. Sometimes the conflict turns into a full-scale war. The warfare religious language is often used as a motivational tool for political ends, for nothing better unites and mobilises people and resources for action than war.

Religious intolerance is not alien to *Hinduism*, as Romila Thapar writes, “despite the nineteenth century myth that the Hindus are by instinct and religion a non-violent people. The genesis of this myth was partly in the romantic image of the Indian past projected, for example, by scholars such as Max Müller” (Thapar 1994:19ff; see Müller 1983:101ff). History bears witness to ample religious conflicts in the Indian society. “In Hindu tradition, for instance, the mythical battles in Mahabharata and Ramayana epics are frequently used as metaphors for present day struggles, just as are the actual battles in Sikh and Islamic history and in biblical Judaism and Christianity” (Juergensmeyer 1991:386). Romila Thapar questions, “One is often struck by how different the message of the Gita would have been and how very much closer to non-violence if Gautama Buddha had been the charioteer of Arjuna instead of Krishna” (Thapar 1997:71).

Writing about “The Mahabharata Legacy, and the Gita’s Intent” Rajmohan Gandhi says:

Proud as we are of the epic’s codes of chivalry, we cannot be proud, I suggest in all humility, of the story, or history, it reveals. In particular, we cannot be proud of the epic’s acquiescence in triumph of revenge over reconciliation. I suggest, further, that we cannot be glad that the epic is reproduced in varied forms in our history (Gandhi 1999: 34).

The concept of soldier-saint is inherent in *Sikh religion*. Before his death, Guru Arjan, (1581-1606) seeing the war-clouds gathering, advised his son Hargobind (1606-1645) to sit fully armed on his throne, and he asked Bhai Buddha to make a soldier-saint out of him (Loehlin 1964:7). Sikhs are independent and democratic; they are

equal members of a Brotherhood, the Khalsa. It was this spirit of independence that drove them to revolt against the Brahman-dominated caste system in the first place; and it was this same spirit that led them to organize the Khalsa as a militant brotherhood to oppose domination by Islam. "The warrior strain appeared in their ancestors of old. Their Aryan forbearers conquered all Northern India, singing the hymns of the Vedas as they went. A devout appreciation of Nature went along with the ruthless dispossession of the *Dasyus* (Dalits). These Vedic Aryans were the original warrior saints, and the ideal of the soldier-saint dominates the Sikhs to this day" (:7).

Certainly the *qur'anic model* of leadership is authoritarian. Starting with the eleventh century AD over a span of eight centuries, conquerors flying the flag of Islam raced down the passes of Hindu Kush, and down the plains and deserts of India, killing those in their way, smashing numberless idols in temples, including images of the Buddha, plundering gold and other precious booty. Sometimes they returned from where they came with their treasures. Occasionally they remained and ruled. Islam teaches it is the duty of Muslims to exert themselves strenuously "in the cause of God" against both personal ungodliness and the enemies of Islam. *Jihad* can mean 'holy war,' but the struggle for uprightness of life and propagation of the faith prefers peaceful means such as persuasion and example. Muslims consider themselves as comprising the *Dar al-Islam*, 'the Household of submission,' and the rest of the world's peoples as the *Dar al-Harb*, 'the Household of warfare.' It is the duty of Muslims to extend the *Dar al-Islam* by means of missionary activities and in some cases even by military jihad, if necessary, toward the ultimate goal of a worldwide Islamic community embracing all. However Quran explicitly admonishes that there shall be "no compulsion in religion" (Sura 2:256). *Jihad* is the only form of armed conflict sanctioned by the religion, and those who fall "in the cause of Allah" are martyrs who will immediately taste the joys of salvation (Sura 2:154; 3:169, 195). Muslims distinguish between the 'greater *jihad*,' which is the constant struggle of the individual believers against his own evil tendencies, and the 'lesser *jihad*,' which is actual armed conflict in defence of the faith or its propagation (Denny 1981:382).

The established leadership usually does not resort to violence; rather the second level of leadership, a younger and more marginalised group for whom the acts of violence are enormously empowering. The

psychological dimension of power may be even more effective. Even a small display of violence can have immense symbolic power: the power to awaken the masses into realization of their potency. This was best illustrated, when on December 6, 1992, the Ayodha's Babri Masjid mosque, built in 1528 by Mir Baqi under the authority of Babar, the first Mughal emperor of India, was demolished in revenge by a mob of more than 300,000 Hindus, most of whom wore the saffron colour of Hindu nationalism. Ashis Nandy aptly puts it, "there is now a peculiar double-bind in Indian politics: the ills of religion have found political expression but the strengths of it have not been available for checking corruption and violence in public life" (Nandy 1985:14-24).

Our brief survey of religious violence sufficiently attests the fact that a community of human beings can be thoroughly blind, corrupt, and incapable of recognizing what is good, just, liberating, and corresponding with God. Very few people would deny that violence with utterly false orientations in which the very powers providing orientation are employed, is a conspiracy against life itself. Religious language always becomes a handy tool to mobilise violence by merging violence and holiness.

Ruthless power politics that rules the world, at times reflects itself in various religions, and eliminates people who are perceived as threat to personal or institutional power. For evil to totally succeed requires that when an evil action is committed it is responded to with violence and retribution. This continues the spiral of evil. Instead of returning evil for evil, we must heed the scripture and try to overcome evil with good (Rom 12:21).

The Christian community in India does not have a history of involvement in religious violence, even though we are victims of violence. They have practiced with honour and respect from all communities, their rights and duties as citizens to work for social progress and promote the ideals, which seem true and right. They work to alleviate human misery and injustice because they believe God loves all people equally and desires justice for all.

## **The cross defines our relationship with others**

How should we then relate to others? The cross defines this. Jesus Christ “died for the ungodly” is the central assertion of the New Testament. The message of the cross is that when we serve and even suffer for others, we are in the company of Jesus Christ.

An exemplary witness to the gospel of reconciliation is demonstrated in the testimony of Gladys Staines. When Graham Staines and his two innocent children Philip and Timothy were burnt alive, in Manoharpur in Orissa, India on 23rd January 1999, his widow Gladys Staines commented, “I have no hatred. I forgive.”

When, the victim, Gladys forgave the perpetrators of the crime she changed the nature of discourse. Forgiveness does not allow perpetrators to decide the terms of discourse, nor to determine under what terms the social conflict is carried out, or the values around which the dispute is rampant. Forgiveness empowers the victims and disempowers the oppressors. The world media was at her doorstep questioning her, “How could you forgive?” Gladys writes:

God did not leave us alone. The whole community rallied around us. We were being upheld through prayer, phone calls and surrounded by not only friends from the local community but of the whole of India. People, whom we had never met, came to comfort and console us. I am overwhelmed and so thankful for many people who prayed and are still praying for us daily. God enabled us to forgive immediately. Jesus Christ has forgiven me and commanded us to forgive. Paul taught us to forgive as Christ has forgiven us. Ephesians 4:32. Forgiveness has brought healing into our lives and become a part of my life. God continues to encourage me to share the message of forgiveness and grace that He has given me. This message from God’s Word the Bible is for each one of us (Gladys Staines 2009).

However Orissa continues to witness waves of persecution against Christians.

## **Remembering the pain of Orissa truthfully**

The Church condemned the painful and barbaric act of killing the 84 year-old religio-political leader Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati and four of his followers on 23 August 2008 by 30 masked Maoist Liberation Guerrilla Army. His killing resulted in the killings of Christians by the sections of Sangh Parivar in Kandhmal and in other

parts of Orissa, although the local Maoists owned responsibility for the killing of the Swami. The analysis of the militant section of Sangh Parivar stands shockingly on a simplistic syllogism. Premise 1: The Christians killed the Swami. Premise 2: Those who kill should be killed or at least punished. Conclusion: We are justified in mistreating and killing of Christians.

When on 24 August they came for Narmada Digal in Kandhmal, she wasn't there. She had fled, five children and mother-in-law in tow, to the safety of the jungles a kilometre away. So, they set about what she left behind; a framed picture of Jesus, a Bible in Oriya, utensils in the kitchen, some clothes, and linen. By the time Narmada sneaked back, her home was gone. What was left was still hot from the ashes, and smoking. The neighbours came to sympathize. Narmada took a good look, stood erect, and pulled her sari over her head. She began to pray. "Lord, forgive us our sins. Jesus, you are the only one. Save us from our misfortune. Free us, Lord." Narmada's children join her. She is weeping as she pleads for deliverance. So is everybody else. It is a solid bond between her and the crucified and resurrected Lord which no human violence can split. "I will die. But I won't stop being a Christian," Narmada says (Simha 2008).

The militant section of the Sangh Parivar burned, killed, beat, raped and forced conversion to Hinduism on Christian believers in Orissa. They systematically destroyed homes, churches, orphanages, Bible schools, even burning entire villages throughout the state of Orissa. The Sangh has assumed the role of jury, judge and executioner. The atrocities against Christians in Orissa are the worst ever in the recorded history of Christianity in India. The state government has totally failed in its duty to protect innocent Christians who are unable to defend themselves. The police have stood by, and occasionally joined the Sangh mobs in the violence.

How should the Church remember and respond to the recent killings of Christians in Orissa? Should we harbour cold and enduring anger, thirst for revenge and react like a wounded animal? In order to respond as free human beings we must value feelings, even the desire for revenge, but it also implies following moral requirements implanted by God into the framework of our humanity. As the Church we must be determined not to lose sight of the command to love one's neighbour, even if the other acts as our enemy.

The victim might question, shouldn't the perpetrators who are truly guilty be dealt with as they deserve to be treated with the strict enforcement of retributive justice? The state is a gift of God's common grace and is granted authority to maintain law and order and restrain evil in society (Rom 13:1-7). However it needs to be stated that Christian love of the enemy does not exclude the concerns for justice but goes beyond it, to forgiveness and reconciliation.

### **Suffering as part of Christian identity**

The Church must integrate the humiliation and pain as part of the Church's life story. Those traumatised and wounded by violence require healing of their memories. Healing is accomplished not so much by remembering traumatic events and their accompanying emotions, as by interpreting memories within the Christian world view and inscribing them into a larger pattern of meaning making them part of our identity. The means of healing and reconciliation is the interpretative work the Church does with the memory of suffering and martyrdom. Suffering can make us better persons; it can draw us closer to God or make us more empathetic with other sufferers. Pain can cause us to grow in righteousness and Christlike character.

### **Public remembering**

If no one remembers the Orissa violence and names it publicly, it remains invisible. To the outside observer, the suffering of victims and the violence of the perpetrators go unseen. Public remembering of wrongs is an act that acknowledges them and is therefore also an act of justice. Acknowledgement is essential to personal and social healing. The remembrance must be truthful.

To remember the wrongdoing truthfully is a process of condemning it. The biblical message of condemning the perpetrator and loving the wrongdoer form part of the Christian story. The message of the Bible is that condemnation is part of reconciliation, not an isolated independent judgement even when reconciliation cannot be achieved (cf Volf 2006). We forgive even when the perpetrator has not asked for forgiveness and work for reconciliation, fully realising reconciliation can only be attained if both parties are willing to be reconciled.



## Need for inter-church community

In the battle against evil, in particular against evil in one's own culture, we need inter-church community. The Church has taken roots universally in many cultures, changing them as well as being profoundly shaped by them. Nevertheless all the Churches in diverse cultures are one just as the triune God is one. No Church in a given culture must commit the sin of self-sufficiency thereby isolating itself. Every Church must be open to all other Churches. Every local church is indeed part of the universal Church but the inverse is equally true that the universal Church is also part of the local church. This makes every local church a truly universal community of the Spirit. This is evident in the life of Christians who overcome national and ethnic rivalries as a result of transformation in Christ. This positions the Church as the multicultural community of the Spirit bound together by the power of the cross of Christ. The moral and social transformation shapes the Church as a transcultural community ordered toward purity of life and adoration of God.

Our commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ who is the Word of God must be supreme so that we hear, trust and obey him in life and death. Yet, lest we drown the voice of Christ we need to see ourselves and our own understanding of God's kingdom with the eyes of Christians from other cultures.

We should not underestimate our ability to twist the Word of God to serve our own communal ideologies and national strategies. The desire for our community survival and prosperity of our culture can easily overpower us all and obscure our vision of God's new creation. If we are unaware that our culture has sabotaged our faith we will lose a platform from which to judge our own culture. In order to keep our allegiance to Jesus Christ pure we are duty-bound to nurture commitment to a multicultural community of Christian churches. Our commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and our commitment to the inter-church community of Christ must go together. You cannot have Christ and reject his universal multicultural body.

The Church is the actual historical bearer of the reconciling message of Jesus Christ. The disciples of Christ are creative catalysts, they are the preserving and illuminating<sup>1</sup> elements in the world

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<sup>1</sup> "You are the salt of the earth"; "You are the light of the world" (Matt 5:13-14).

without which the earth cannot survive and remains in darkness. Their light thus becomes the hope of the world. The disciples are indispensable for the accomplishment of God's purpose in the world. Their mission is accomplished not only in word but in the deeds of their daily existence.

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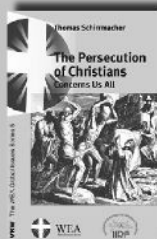
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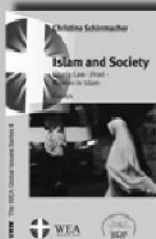
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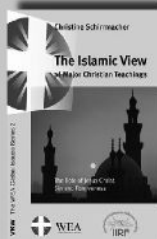
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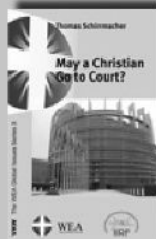
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# The role of government and judicial action in defining religious freedom:

## A Sri Lankan perspective

Roshini Wickremesinhe\*

### Abstract

This study examines the role of government policy, judicial action and politics in the context of the fundamental right of religious freedom and religious persecution with emphasis on the experience of Sri Lanka. In 2004 the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) National Heritage Party, the first Buddhist political party, sought to amend the constitution of Sri Lanka, making Buddhism the state religion. There were also three attempts to introduce anti-conversion laws, both by the government and this party. While there is no legal requirement for registration of religious bodies, there are tendencies to harass churches on the basis that they are not registered. Three court rulings denying registration to Christian bodies effectively closed the door to incorporation of Christian ministries. There are arbitrary moves to restrict legitimacy of Christian religious institutions by state machinery.

**Keywords** Persecution phases, religious freedom, role of state and politics, law and judicial action, prohibitive legislation, recognition or legitimising religion.

From New Testament times under the Roman Empire up to the present, Christians from every continent have faced persecution in various forms, even to the extent of torture and death, some inflicted by mobs and some at the hands of authorities. What constitutes 'religious persecution' or the legal definition of the term 'persecution' lacks a universally accepted standard. While some writers and scholars argue that it includes acts of discrimination and mild abuse, others hold the view that the term persecution is "reserved for more extreme, gross violations of one's religious freedom, such as torture

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\* Roshini Wickremesinhe (\*1968) read Law at the University of Colombo in Sri Lanka and is a lawyer. She serves the Religious Liberty Commission of the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL) as Director of Advocacy and Law, where she has worked for the past 9 years. Presently she is also Director of the Religious Liberty Commission of the Asian Evangelical Alliance (AEA) and serves on the board of Advocates Asia. As a human rights campaigner and advocacy trainer, she specializes in religious freedom. E-mail: [nceasl@generalmail.com](mailto:nceasl@generalmail.com).

and imprisonment.”<sup>1</sup> Paul Marshall defines religious persecution as a general denial of a right to religious freedom, but also goes on to define specific terms such as ‘harassment’ and ‘discrimination’ as being distinct from ‘persecution.’<sup>2</sup> The World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission has discussed a common pattern in persecution consisting of three stages. The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka identifies these phases as the three ‘D’s of disinformation, discrimination and destruction or violence.’<sup>3</sup> We see all the forms of persecution inflicted by both state and non-state actors in countries governed by autocratic systems of dictatorship, communist regimes and military governments as well as in some democracies. This study will examine the role of government policy, judicial action and politics in the context of the fundamental right of religious freedom and religious persecution; with emphasis on the experience of Sri Lanka.

## **A lesson from history - religious freedom in Sri Lanka**

It is only in recent years that the phenomenon of religious persecution and the concept of ‘religious freedom’ as a basic human right defined and protected by law has become a subject of conscious public interest in Sri Lanka. However, it has been addressed in Sri Lankan statutes for more than a century.

In 1815, the British conquered the entire island of Ceylon (later named Sri Lanka), after years of fighting to capture the mountainous provinces (Kandyan kingdom) of the island where the last king of Sri Lanka king Sri Wickramarajasinghe ruled. He was exiled and Britain took over the administration of Ceylon after the Kandyan Convention – an agreement between the British and the Kandyan chiefs, was signed. Article 5 of the Kandyan Convention stated that “the religion of Buddhism professed by the chief and inhabitancy of these provinces is declared in-violable and its rights, ministers, and places of worship are to be maintained and protected.” When viewed in the context of colonial rule, this provision embodies the ideal of religious

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Boyd-McMillan, *Faith that Endures* 2006:90.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Marshall, *Their blood cries out* 1997:248-249.

<sup>3</sup> Godfrey Yogarajah, *Disinformation, discrimination, destruction and growth – a case study on persecution of Christians in Sri Lanka*, IJRF Vol 1 Issue 1 2008: 87.

freedom, by granting specific protection to the majority religion of the vanquished inhabitants. The fall of the Kandyan kingdom was due greatly to the defection of several of the king's chiefs and officials. Hence the inclusion of this article may in reality have been part of an arrangement between the British and the Kandyan chiefs, to appease the local polity.<sup>4</sup> The article was superseded by the Proclamation of 1818, which also made special mention of the Crown's protection of Buddhism.<sup>5</sup> Although there were Hindu, Moor, Christian and other religious minorities among the population, this special provision was exclusive to the majority religion.

The Kandyan Convention of 1815 can be said to hold the dubious honour of being the first document specifying government intervention to protect religious freedom as well as the origin of special state protection accorded to Buddhism, veering Sri Lanka from the ideal of a secular constitution.

The first Independence Constitution of 1947 was secular in nature, according equal rights to all religions. However, the subsequent first Republican Constitution of 1972 saw a departure from secularism, casting a duty upon the state to protect and foster Buddhism.<sup>6</sup>

The subsequent (and current) constitution of 1978 follows the same pattern, where Article 9 grants Buddhism "foremost place" and accordingly, casts upon the state a duty to "protect and foster" Buddhism. In modern jurisprudence special state patronage and protective clauses are used to protect the fundamental rights of minorities. The Sri Lankan example of state patronage and protection of Buddhism defies this principle and logic in that it safeguards the majority religion.

## The case for a Buddhist state

Taking it a step further, in 2004, the *Jathika Hela Urumaya* (JHU) National Heritage party, through a private member's bill presented in Parliament, sought to amend the constitution of Sri Lanka, making Buddhism the state religion and "to provide for binding persons

<sup>4</sup> M. J. A. Cooray, *Judicial role under the constitutions of Ceylon/Sri Lanka – a historical and comparative study*, 1982:17.

<sup>5</sup> Article 16 of the 1818 Proclamation.

<sup>6</sup> Article 6 of the first Republican Constitution of Sri Lanka 1972.

practicing Buddhism to bring up their offspring in the same; [and] to provide for prohibiting conversion of Buddhists.”<sup>7</sup> The proposed 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment allowed for other forms of religions and worship to be practiced, as long as it was in “peace and harmony” with all aspects of Buddhism including Buddhist teachings, clergy, temples, artefacts, texts, libraries, Buddhist education centres, culture, festivals, rituals etc. The preamble of the bill states that:

whereas the Buddhist population which is the overwhelming majority must practice its religion in peace and harmony, and as the Buddha *Sasana*<sup>8</sup> has faced the threat of decline ... it is the duty of the Parliament to restore the patronage and protection historically enjoyed by Buddha *Sasana*.

The proposed bill was challenged before the Supreme Court, the petitioners submitting that the bill in its entirety and in part is vague, ambiguous and inconsistent with the constitution. Further, that certain clauses of the said bill are inconsistent with the spirit of the constitution, ideal of a secular state, norms of pluralistic society and Sri Lanka’s international obligations,<sup>9</sup> while undermining the religious freedom of Buddhists and violating the absolute freedom of religion granted to all citizens under Article 10 of the constitution.

Article 10 of the Sri Lankan Constitution guarantees that “every person is entitled to the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.” Article 14 (1) (e) further grants the freedom of worship, observance, practice and teaching of his religion or belief, in private or in public, either by himself or in association with others.<sup>10</sup>

The three-judge bench of the Supreme Court determined that clauses 9:1–9:5 of the proposed amendment are inconsistent with the

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<sup>7</sup> 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution of Sri Lanka, private member’s bill, government Gazette part II of 29<sup>th</sup> October 2004 (supplement).

<sup>8</sup> ‘*Sasana*’ traditionally meant the three main aspects of Buddhism: Buddha, *Dhamma* (teachings of the Buddha) and *Sangha* (clergy). Although, in the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the meaning was expanded to include temples, culture, rituals etc. See 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

<sup>9</sup> The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Sri Lanka is a signatory to both instruments as well as the Optional Protocol of the ICCPR.

<sup>10</sup> Article 10 and 14 (1) (e) of the Constitution of Sri Lanka 1978 echo Article 18 of the UDHR and the ICCPR.



constitution insofar as they affect fundamental rights of thoughts, conscience, religion and equality. The Supreme Court concluded that the amendment requires a special majority vote in Parliament ( two-thirds majority) and approval by the people at a referendum, in order to become law.<sup>11</sup>

Following the bitter experiences of colonial rule under the Portuguese and the Dutch who invaded the Maritime Provinces, the perception of the Kandyan chiefs of 1815 that the British posed a similar threat to the existence of Buddhism and their religious freedom is justified and hence one can understand the reasoning behind the special provision in the Kandyan Convention. However, is such special protection necessary or justified in a modern democracy where more than 70 per cent of the 20 million population profess Buddhism? Is Buddhism today facing “a threat of decline” as claimed by the proponents of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment?

The form of Theravada Buddhism prevalent in Sri Lanka (introduced to the island in 247 B.C.), the Sinhala language and indeed the Sinhalese race are unique to Sri Lanka, making them a global minority, increasingly aware of the fact that one’s religion, culture and language must be preserved from the onslaughts and effects of globalisation.

Furthermore, there remain negative perceptions of Christianity, influenced by atrocities and discrimination suffered by Buddhism under colonial powers. Although the Christian population has declined since the time of colonial rule and according to the last national census remains at 6.89 per cent of the population (mostly Roman Catholics and less than 1 per cent Protestants), the perception, sadly, persists that Buddhist culture is under serious threat by ‘foreign’ and ‘Western’ Christianity.

## Politicising religion

The answer to the question also lies partly in ‘numbers’. Simply put, how many votes does it take to win an election? Statistics play an important role in post-independence Sri Lankan politics.

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<sup>11</sup> Article 83 (a) of the Constitution of Sri Lanka 1978: Amendment of certain important provisions of the Constitution requires a referendum.

Votes are essential to gain and maintain political power, and religion is a powerful and emotive issue which can win or lose votes. It follows that championing the religious rights of the majority against threats real or imagined makes popular political strategy – irrespective of whether the motivation is genuine devotion to one’s faith or cunning.

The formation of what is arguably the first Buddhist political party took place in December 2003, following the death of a popular *bhikku*<sup>12</sup> Ven. Gangodawila Soma Thero, who died while on a visit to Russia. Orchestrated mass hysteria accusing Christians of murdering the Ven. Thero resulted in dozens of churches being attacked in the aftermath of the funeral. A presidential directive deploying troops and police to guard churches prevented what could have become an ugly witch-hunt of innocent Christian citizens. The climate of Buddhist religious fervour that was whipped up became a perfect spring-board for launching the *Jathika Hela Urumaya* (JHU) national heritage political party, led by a group of Buddhist monks. Promises of establishing a Buddhist nation and enacting laws prohibiting religious conversions were key planks of the JHU’s election platform.

One month later, Buddhist monks from the JHU launched a ‘fast-unto-death’ campaign demanding the government to enact anti-conversion legislation within 60 days. Fearing the people’s wrath and the consequences to the government if another death of a monk occurred, the government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe agreed to the demand and the fast was called off. It was a clear demonstration of the power of Buddhism in dictating state policy. However, before the expiration of 60 days, Parliament was dissolved by the president and he called for a parliamentary election. Four months later, at the parliamentary election in April 2004, the JHU emerged as the third largest political force in the country, winning over 500,000 votes and 9 seats in Parliament. Within six months of being elected, the JHU went on to propose a bill limiting religious conversions as well as the above discussed 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the constitution.

At the presidential election in 2005, the election manifesto of both leading candidates addressed the issue of religious freedom.

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<sup>12</sup> A *bhikku* is one who has renounced worldly life and joined the mendicant and contemplative community.

‘Mahinda Chinthanaya’ the election manifesto of Mahinda Rajapaksa, presidential candidate of the United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA) stated, “while preference given to Buddhism in terms of the constitution will be consolidated, all other religions including Hinduism, Islam, Catholicism and Christianity will [be] treated on an equal footing.”<sup>13</sup> The candidate of the United National Party (UNP) Ranil Wickremesinghe in chapter 10 of his manifesto titled *A righteous society*, stated “we will create an environment for all Christians to practice their religion freely.”<sup>14</sup>

The fact that this was the first time in the country’s election history that presidential candidates highlighted this issue in their election manifesto is indicative of the growing importance of the issue of religion and religious freedom in politics. Two days prior to the 2005 presidential election, the chief prelates of the four Buddhist *Nikayas*<sup>15</sup> issued a joint statement urging people to vote wisely in a bid to preserve the unitary status of the country as well as to protect Buddhism.

As members of the *Maha Sangha*<sup>16</sup>, we consider it is our supreme duty to advise and guide the government and the citizens in general, in protecting and developing our people, particularly the Sinhala Buddhist population of Sri Lanka, and the country where the great teachings of Lord Buddha have been preserved and protected for nearly 2,500 years. We accept that there is a threat to every race and religion in Sri Lanka [...]. Among them is the fundamentalist movement to convert the innocent Buddhists to other religions.<sup>17</sup>

Religion had undoubtedly become an important factor in securing political power in modern Sri Lanka.

## Prohibitive legislation

Notwithstanding constitutional guarantees on religious freedom and Sri Lanka’s obligations under international law, there were three attempts to introduce anti-conversion laws, both by the Sri Lankan

<sup>13</sup> ‘Mahinda Chinthanaya’ 2005:14.

<sup>14</sup> Election manifesto of Ranil Wickremesinghe 2005:10.

<sup>15</sup> *Nikaya* is a chapter, similar to a denomination in Christianity.

<sup>16</sup> Buddhist clergy.

<sup>17</sup> Colombo Page News Desk, Sri Lanka, 15<sup>th</sup> November 2005. Article titled: “Four Buddhist Nikayas urge people to vote wisely, preserve Sri Lanka’s unitary state and protect Buddhism.”

government and the JHU. The example from which they drew inspiration was India – the world’s largest democracy, where ironically, at that time, six states were yoked under various forms of anti-conversion laws. The initial draft bill (modelled almost exactly on the now repealed anti-conversion bill of Tamil Nadu State) was unveiled in July 2003 by Minister of Hindu Cultural Affairs Mr Maheswaran. Although a cabinet minister, Mr Maheswaran was a minority ethnic Tamil and a Hindu who wielded little political clout both within and without the House. Perhaps recognising this limitation and the possible defeat of the bill, the Minister of Buddha *Sasan* and Justice and Legal Reform W.J.M. Lokubandara – a veteran politician respected by the people as a champion of Sinhala Buddhist culture and religion, formally announced that he would be presenting an anti-conversion bill. By mid 2004, a new draft bill proposed by Minister Lokubandara, representing the government as well as the bill proposed by the JHU, were unveiled. The JHU cited the recommendations of the 2002 report by the presidential commission on Buddhism<sup>18</sup> to enact anti-conversion laws to curb Christian activity as their motivation.<sup>19</sup>

The more draconian of these two draft legislations titled *Freedom of religion bill* proposed by Minister Lokubandara would have made it an offence<sup>20</sup> for any person to “unethically convert or attempt to convert any other person” from one religion to another.<sup>21</sup> The term ‘unethically convert’ was defined as: “to directly or indirectly make, persuade or influence” a person to adopt another religion ... by use of any kind of allotment or promise of allurements, or inducement or promise of inducement, or material assistance [...]”<sup>22</sup> Consider the following every-day-life scenarios, in the light of this definition:

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<sup>18</sup> Official commission appointed by President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga.

<sup>19</sup> Venerable Athureliye Rathana Thero M.P. speaking to media in 2006. Ceylon Daily News paper of 7<sup>th</sup> April 2006. Online <http://www.dailynews.lk/2006/04/07/po101.asp>.

<sup>20</sup> This bill no longer is a threat.

<sup>21</sup> Section 2, Freedom of religion bill, Gazette notification part II of 24<sup>th</sup> June 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Section 10, Freedom of religion bill, Gazette notification part II of 24<sup>th</sup> June 2005.

Engaging in prayer, sharing from Scripture, teaching, singing sacred songs or practicing charity in a multi religious environment such as one's neighbourhood, place of work, school or any public place may be considered illegal, since it can "directly or indirectly make, persuade, or influence" another person to become interested in one's religion, leading to a conversion. Religious celebrations and events which are open to the public such as Christmas, Sunday worship services, prayer meetings or any event where the Christian faith is manifested may be considered forms of behaviour designed to 'influence' a person to embrace one's own religion. Similarly, preaching the message of salvation and forgiveness of sins to those who believe in Christ may be considered "a promise of allurement or inducement" in the form of eternal life which could "directly or indirectly, persuade or influence" a person to convert to Christianity. The bill also would have prescribed unusually heavy fines and prison terms of up to seven years as punishment. It was shelved due to internal political upheavals as well as pressure from human rights groups and the international community.

The 'Prohibition of forcible conversion of religion' bill proposed by the JHU as a private member's bill in 2004 remains active, although not yet enacted as law. The bill would in essence declare it a punishable offence to convert or attempt to convert any person from one religion to another by use of force or by allurement or by any fraudulent means. It also would make it an offence to aid or abet any such conversions. The broad and vague interpretation of the terms 'allurement', 'force' and 'fraudulent' contained in the bill would leave it open to subjective interpretation by the courts. For example, 'allurement' is defined as an offer of any gift or temptation in the form of any gift in cash or kind, any material benefit in cash or kind, offer of employment or promotion in employment. Any religious body, individual, church or organisation engaging in charitable deeds such as providing food, shelter, medical care, education or the running of orphanages, schools, homes for the aged may then be accused and convicted of attempting to convert a person through 'allurement' and liable to a heavy fine and imprisonment up to five years.

It was challenged before the Supreme Court by Christian and civic groups on the premise that the draft bill violates fundamental rights guaranteed under the Sri Lankan Constitution. The Supreme Court ruled two clauses *ultra vires* the constitution. These were

clauses 3 and 4(b) – prescribing a draconian reporting requirement of all conversion related activity and punishment for failure to do so.<sup>23</sup> The Court recommended the removal or modification of the offending clauses, whereby a simple majority in Parliament can pass the bill. After going through the various stages of the legislative process, the amended draft bill presently lies with a consultative committee of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, prior to the third and final reading and vote in Parliament.

## **The question of legitimacy - state approval or recognition through registration**

Religion may be said to consist of a system of moral and ethical principles prescribing a code of conduct; it involves a statement of doctrine and a form of ritual and religious observance; all of which a man honestly believes in and approves of and thinks is his duty to inculcate on others, whether with regard to this world or the next.<sup>24</sup>

Who or what defines the legitimacy of a religion or belief? International human rights law has sought to avoid philosophical and ideological controversy by identifying certain categories of rights such as the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, rather than attempt definition.<sup>25</sup> The state and the law have a moral obligation and responsibility to protect society from activities which are illegal or promote moral degeneration, while not infringing on the previously mentioned fundamental freedoms. Our purpose here is not to discuss the delicate line which divides the operation of such obligation and the unhindered enjoyment of the right of religious freedom, but to explore the question of state conferred legitimacy of religion or religious institutions, based solely on a system of registration with, or acceptance by the state.

Here again, there are varying levels of state sponsored legitimacy, from the most extreme which is a total ban on religion, or on the other hand, recognition based on fulfilment of a condition or recognition tied to a particular action such as construction of a church.

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<sup>23</sup> Prohibition of forcible conversion of religions, government Gazette supplement part II of 28<sup>th</sup> May 2004.

<sup>24</sup> J.A.L. Cooray, Constitutional and administrative law of Sri Lanka, 1973:526.

<sup>25</sup> Natan Lerner, the nature or standard of freedom of religion or belief, Facilitating freedom of religion or belief: A desk book, 2004:65.

Ronald Boyd-McMillan says that “the mark of a totalitarian government is that they refuse any group of people the right to gather without permission”<sup>26</sup> irrespective of the purpose of the gathering. This form of religious persecution, cloaked in the respectability of laws, decrees and regulations is increasingly evident, but not limited to totalitarian governments.

## Recognition - the Sri Lankan experience

Under Sri Lanka’s democratic system of government, religious rights are guaranteed under the constitution (as discussed elsewhere in this paper). There is no legal requirement for registration of religious bodies with the state. However, in order to contract business transactions such as buying or selling of property, religious institutions must fulfil the requirement of legal persona. Ideally, religious bodies fulfil this requirement through incorporation by an Act of Parliament. It is a lengthy process, where a bill seeking incorporation must be prepared and presented in parliament through a M.P. or a party where it goes through the normal procedure of passing an Act of Parliament.

While in the past all religions had equal opportunity to avail themselves of this right through incorporation, the anti-Christian movement of the 1990s became active in preventing incorporation of Christian churches and organisations. Many of the traditional mainline denominations and some older evangelical denominations were already incorporated or were assumed to be ‘legitimate’ due to their long history and presence on the island. It is pertinent to remember that incorporation by an Act of Parliament is not a legal requirement for the establishment or function of a religious organisation or a place of worship. However, in practice, Christian churches and organisations were singled out and often challenged by mobs and even by the police and local government officials, to show ‘registration’ as proof of their legitimacy and right to exist.<sup>27</sup> The myth of churches ‘recognised’ or ‘approved’ by the state was thus perpetuated. It was however, neither law nor state policy.

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<sup>26</sup> Ronald Boyd-McMillan, *Faith that Endures* 2006:72

<sup>27</sup> Incident reports compiled by the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka reveal many such instances.

Mounting pressure by radical Buddhist nationalist groups such as SUCCESS<sup>28</sup> and the JHU agitating for repression of Christian activity led the government in 2003 to propose the compilation of a list of ‘recognized’ churches – probably as an appeasement to the Buddhist lobby. It caused great concern among the Protestant churches that this may well lead to churches which are not on the list of ‘recognized’ churches being declared illegal by the state, resulting in the closure of hundreds of churches and government interference in matters of personal faith and religion. Leaders of the Protestant churches rejected the move on principle and the matter was not pursued.

## Important judicial decisions

In a multicultural democracy,

the judicial organ of the state can by its actions dissipate tensions in a way other organs subject to electoral politics and pressures can not. Or it can exacerbate those tensions in a way that fundamentally weakens the credibility of the institutions – the multicultural legitimacy – of the state.<sup>29</sup>

Unfortunately, in the Sri Lankan experience discussed below, the latter is true.

In 2002–2003, the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka delivered determinations on three bills which sought to incorporate three separate Christian ministries. Paradoxically, the Supreme Court ruled all three bills were unconstitutional, by reason of being inconsistent with Article 10 of the constitution (which guarantees the freedom of thought, conscience and religion), while the third bill was deemed also to be inconsistent with the foremost place accorded to Buddhism under Article 9.

The first determination was on a petition against the bill to incorporate the ‘Christian *Sahanaye Doratuwa* Prayer Centre’ in 2002. The Court reasoned that the rights guaranteed to citizens under the constitution to practice a religion of choice, as enumerated in Article

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<sup>28</sup> Acronym for the Society for Upliftment and Conservation of Cultural Educational and Social Standards. A radical and well organised Buddhist nationalist group. Has a wide membership drawn from all spheres of society, generally operates anonymously. At a high-powered meeting in 2001 to re-launch SUCCESS, their leaders called upon Buddhists to utilize “any method, even violence” to counter the spread of Christianity.

<sup>29</sup> Asanga Welikala, *The Menzinger Determination and the Supreme Court: A Liberal Critique*, Centre for Policy Alternatives Sri Lanka, 2003:1.



14 (1) (e) is distinct from Article 14 (1) (g) which guarantees the right of citizens to engage in a lawful occupation, trade, business or enterprise. The Court concluded that, “a prayer centre that seeks special legislative recognition by way of incorporation cannot avail itself of these two freedoms together.”<sup>30</sup> Simply put, the Supreme Court reasoned that multiples of freedoms or rights cannot be enjoyed by a single entity, simultaneously.

In the matter of the ‘New Wine Harvest Ministries’ – a Christian worship centre seeking incorporation, the Supreme Court expanded on its reasoning in the Prayer Centre determination. The Court determined that uplifting the socio-economic condition of people not restricted to those who are of one’s own religion amounts to allurements which “would necessarily result in an inconsistency with the free exercise of a person’s thought, conscience and religion as postulated in Article 10 of the constitution.”<sup>31</sup>

The argument by counsel for the intervenient petitioner New Wine Harvest Ministries that nearly all previously incorporated religious bodies from all faiths have as their objective the dissemination of the principles of their faith as well as social welfare and education was deemed irrelevant by the Court.

Later that same year the Supreme Court considered the bill for the incorporation of an order of Catholic nuns, the ‘Sisters of the Holy Cross of the Third Order of St. Francis in Menzingen’. The Court reiterated its reasoning in the two preceding determinations that it is unconstitutional for a Christian organisation that spreads the Christian message to also engage in social development activities. Further, the Court stated that the Sri Lankan Constitution guarantees the manifestation, observance and practice of religion but not the right of propagation – which was one of the stated objectives of the Menzingen Sisters. “The propagation and spreading of Christianity ... would not be permissible as it would impair the very existence of Buddhism ...” the Court stated.<sup>32</sup>

The determinations of the learned justices set an impossible precedent whereby any group with the objective of propagating a religion and engaging in social development activities can only be

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<sup>30</sup> Supreme Court Determination 2/2001.

<sup>31</sup> Supreme Court Special Determination 2/2003.

<sup>32</sup> Supreme Court Special Determination 19/2003.

incorporated if the bill is passed by a two-thirds majority in parliament and at a referendum. It effectively closed the door to incorporation of already beleaguered Christian ministries.

## Denial of existence

Further to disinformation, discrimination and destruction emerges another phase of persecution, where the state refuses to recognise certain religious groups and in effect, denies the existence of such groups. This does not extend to the outright banning of the group whereby their existence becomes illegal, but a simple refusal to officially acknowledge their existence. If one does not exist, one does not have any rights. Therefore violation of one's rights too does not exist. This method of denying existence, when used as a tool of persecution against a religious group or any segment of society, at worst, can lead to horrifying results such as murder or extra-judicial killings and at best, alienate and subjugate people through subtle methods which are respectable at face value – but beneath that veneer, they are efficient in stripping people of their rights and relegating them to the periphery of society, with little or no recourse to justice. In between, there are many levels on which this method of persecution can take place. While tyrannical dictators and Communist regimes seem most likely to engage in such methods of persecution, the danger of a democratic state resorting to it can also be disturbingly real.

In September 2008, the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Sri Lanka was instructed by the executive to draft legislation whereby future construction of any place of worship is subject to the prior permission of the Ministry. Given the complexity of Sri Lanka's multicultural society and politics, there may be genuine reasons warranting such a directive. This discussion will focus on the practice and repercussions of this directive, in the context of decrees and regulations bestowing 'recognition' on religious bodies and not discussing the merits or demerits of the stated objectives or reasons.

The secretary to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Moral Upliftment informed all Provincial Councils and Divisional Secretariats (local government bodies) to comply with this requirement – in addition to other existing legal requirements – with immediate effect and create necessary bi-laws for proper enforcement.<sup>33</sup> For the present, applicants are required to fill in a specified application, which the local government

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<sup>33</sup> Letters dated 10<sup>th</sup> September 2008 and 16<sup>th</sup> October 2008.

body must endorse and forward to the Ministry for their consideration and approval. Applicants cannot approach the Ministry directly.

The procedure itself is inconsistent with principles of equality and justice in that it exempts 'traditional religions' from submitting documentary evidence required by the Ministry to prove their bona-fide. However, nowhere does it specify what 'traditional religions' are. Local government or Religious Affairs Ministry officials make the decision based on their own understanding or biases. While Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam are generally accepted as 'traditional' religions, only some Christian denominations such as the Roman Catholic Church and older Protestant denominations which were introduced during the time of Portuguese, Dutch or British Colonial rule, are accepted as 'traditional.' Newer Christian denominations are viewed with suspicion. The Assemblies of God in Sri Lanka, for example, which has existed since 1919 and was incorporated by an Act of Parliament in 1947 was not accepted as a 'traditional church' when it sought approval for construction. Even where such churches have complied with all the regulations and provided documentation to prove their bona-fide, their applications are not approved by the Ministry.

The need for Ministry's approval of construction, in fact, becomes a vehicle by which 'legitimacy' is bestowed on religious institutions and by extension religions, by the state machinery.

Perhaps the most alarming repercussion of this directive is the blatant abuse of it by state officials to harass Christians. Churches, which have already been in existence for years, are asked by local government officials to furnish approval from the Ministry of Religious Affairs.<sup>34</sup> The directive is clearly applicable only to new constructions and does not have retrospective effect. However, it is misapplied and used by state officials as a tool to close down existing churches or threaten demolition.

The experience of the Kithu Sevana church in Galgamuwa, Kurunegala district is a case in point. The Divisional Secretariat sought closure of the church building which had already been legally approved for construction, prior to the presidential directive. Despite this fact, the pastor was warned that his church could be demolished

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<sup>34</sup> Examples: Assemblies of God church in Dickwella, Matara District, Vineyard Community church in Makandura, Kurunegala District, Assemblies of God church in Middeniya, Hambanthota District. Requests made by letter or verbally by Provincial Council or Divisional Secretariat officials.

since he did not obtain approval from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The Divisional Secretary of Galgamuwa in a letter dated 11<sup>th</sup> August 2009 informed the pastor that the Secretary of the Ministry of Religious Affairs has instructed the Divisional Secretary to file legal action against the pastor and ordered a halt to the construction.

There appears a spiraling trend of churches being refused permission for construction, permission to register marriages in their churches, or issuance of visas for Christian leaders to attend conferences. A prerequisite for all of the above is a letter acknowledging one's legitimacy from the Ministry of Religious Affairs.<sup>35</sup>

## Conclusion

Freedom to have or adopt a religion or faith of choice is a fundamental human right, a quintessential requirement of a vibrant democracy. It follows that the free existence of religions, too, is a phenomenon evident in a democracy. Registration or recognition of religious organisations or a place of worship under a condition is in effect recognition or acceptance of a religion by the state. If one were to decide that stars are heavenly bodies worthy of worship and establish a 'religion' of star worshippers, can a state determine if that is in fact a legitimate religion or not? In doing so, the state in effect infringes on one's sacred human right to have a religion. Human rights do not vest with the state or the law or society. It is therefore not the prerogative of government or the law to bestow human rights on people as a privilege. Thomas Schirrmacher very rightly observes that "human dignity and human rights are part of man's being as God's creation. Thus, the state does not create human rights; it merely formulates and protects them."<sup>36</sup> This then is the ideal, the purpose of government and law in the context of human rights. Sadly though in Asia, and perhaps in much of the world, we lack role models who emulate this ideal.

There never was found, in any age of the world,  
either religion or law that did so highly exalt  
the public good as the Bible.

(Sir Francis Bacon, English lawyer, philosopher and essayist 1561-1626)

<sup>35</sup> Complaints and reports received by the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Schirrmacher, The persecution of Christians concerns us all, The WEA global issues series Volume 5, 2008:111.

## “The religious other as a threat:”

### Religious persecution expressing xenophobia - a global survey of Christian-Muslim convivence

Christof Sauer\*

#### Abstract

This article examines xenophobia as a significant factor in religious persecution in contexts where Christians and Muslims live together, because “the religious other” is often perceived as a threat, resulting in restriction of religious freedom and social discrimination. The article explores a deeper understanding of the interplay between religion, xenophobia and religious persecution by examining the relevant data in the most extensive scholarly surveys on religious freedom/ persecution in the world and draws on a new hermeneutical model of understanding the stranger.

**Keywords** Religious other, religious persecution, xenophobia, Christian-Muslim convivence, social regulation of religion, government regulation of religion, religious freedom index, country profiles, hermeneutics, stranger, tribalism.

#### Introduction

As the director of the Cape Town Bureau of the International Institute for Religious Freedom of the World Evangelical Alliance – which is academically researching persecution – and as a foreigner in South Africa, I propose to provide a global perspective and to highlight the role xenophobia plays in religious persecution. This could broaden the discourse on the relationship between religion and xenophobia. I am doing this as a Christian theologian, or more specifically, as an evangelical Lutheran with conciliatory inclinations.

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\* Dr Christof Sauer (\*1963) is the Co-Director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom of the World Evangelical Alliance. He received his doctorate of theology in missiology from the University of South Africa in 2002. A shorter version of this paper was presented at the International Conference on Religion and Xenophobia – Islamic and Christian Perspectives, 17-19 November 2008 in Cape Town, South Africa, before a largely Muslim audience. The conference was convened by the Committee for Theological Dialogue (which was constituted for the event), Cape Town, South Africa and the Islamic Culture and Relations Organisation, Tehran, Iran. Contact: [christof@iirf.eu](mailto:christof@iirf.eu).

I hail from Germany, a country where more than 60 years ago dictatorial authorities murdered six million Jews – this can well be described as xenophobia. I also hail from a church which made the following confession in the *Stuttgart Confession of Guilt*:

By us infinite wrong was brought over many peoples and countries. That which we often testified to in our communities, we express now in the name of the whole Church: We did fight for long years in the name of Jesus Christ against the mentality that found its awful expression in the National Socialist regime of violence; we accuse ourselves for not abiding by our beliefs more courageously, for not praying more faithfully, for not believing more joyously, and for not loving more ardently.<sup>1</sup>

Church leaders in Germany today are still reminding the public of the atrocities that happened in their own country not so long ago, such as recently mentioned in a common word from the Chairs of both, the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany and the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference, who remembered the November Pogroms in 1938 against the Jewish population and their synagogues.<sup>2</sup> They also raised their voices against anti-semitism, racism, and xenophobia of today.

Thus, when countries are identified by name in this article, I do not mean to attack their governments, to insult their citizens or to defame their religious beliefs. But I hold that the realities of religious persecution today should be included in an open and frank dialogue between Muslims and Christians when examining religion and xenophobia.

I define religious persecution sociologically in line with Tieszen (2008:44) as “an unjust action of varying levels of hostility directed at a believer or believers of a particular religion or belief-system through systematic oppression or genocide, or through harassment or discrimination which may not necessarily limit these believers’ ability to practice their faith, resulting in varying levels of harm as it is considered from the victim’s perspective, each action having religion as its primary motivator.”

My understanding of “the religious other” is based on the work of Theo Sundermeier (2006), who pleads for a healthy “convivence”

<sup>1</sup> <http://tinyurl.com/stutt-guilt>. Translation edited.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.ekd.de/presse/pm292\\_2008\\_ekd\\_dbk\\_pogromnacht.html](http://www.ekd.de/presse/pm292_2008_ekd_dbk_pogromnacht.html).

(living together) across religious, racial, ethnic and national divides. I understand xenophobia to broadly mean a fear of what is unfamiliar, particularly the other who is religiously different and therefore perceived as a threat.

Religious persecution, restriction of religious freedom, and religiously motivated social discrimination are widespread phenomena which are severely under-reported and under-researched. The large majority of its victims are Christians. The main perpetrators are adherents of other world religions and worldviews, whose ideological inclinations are often combined with a form of nationalism. In view of this disproportionate picture, I propose, for the purposes of this paper, simply to examine the role of xenophobia in religious persecution in the contexts where Muslims and Christians encounter each other.

I shall try to demonstrate that xenophobia is a significant factor in religious persecution in contexts where Christians and Muslims live together, because “the religious other” is often perceived as a threat, resulting in restrictions of religious freedom and social discrimination. The aim of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the interplay between religion, xenophobia and religious persecution, by examining the relevant data of the most extensive scholarly surveys on religious freedom/ persecution in the world and drawing on a new hermeneutical model of understanding the stranger.

## **1. Social regulation of religion and religious persecution - a quantitative assessment**

How can the relationship between xenophobia and religious persecution be measured? Only recently a model which explains religious persecution, and includes sophisticated statistical instruments for measuring it, has been developed in the field of sociology of religion. The pioneers, Brian J Grim and his colleague professor Roger Finke have supplied the first cross-national datasets, which start to remedy the lack of data on the role of religion in social conflict.

### **1.1 Theoretical framework**

While xenophobia is not a specific focus of their research, Grim has indicated to me in private communication: “It may be possible to consider that ‘social regulation of religion’ [their field of research] is

actually a proxy measure for xenophobia since it represents the degree to which religious groups hold negative and exclusionary attitudes toward other or non-traditional religions.” A recent paper by Grim and Finke (2007) on “Religious persecution in cross-national context” shows a clear connection between social regulation and religious persecution.

So, what can we learn from Grim and Finke's paper about the connection between religious persecution and xenophobia, using social regulation of religion as a proxy measure for xenophobia?

Grim and Finke find that “social religious regulation is associated with religious persecution indirectly through its effect on government regulation,” while government regulation of religion is most directly associated with religious persecution (2007:647). The only additional factor leading to persecution – among those tested – is armed conflict.

What is their theoretical framework? Grim and Finke hold that religion itself (and not only corrupted versions of religion) must be seen as an independent cause in social conflict besides political and economic causes. Furthermore, religion and ethnicity must not be conflated in explaining social conflict. While they do overlap they are not identical, and the degree of overlap will vary greatly from country to country. The Huntington “clash of civilisations model” is also considered unsatisfactory, as it tries to explain social conflict based on *general* differences between religious traditions. Grim and Finke examine specific actions and behaviours, regardless of the religious tradition involved.

Based on the “religious economies model” Grim and Finke describe a “regulation of religion mechanism” which has the benefit of accounting for differences between religious traditions and offering empirically-supported conceptual clarity as to the sources of religious persecution.

The “religious economies model” (Finke and Stark), postulates the flourishing of religions when they are unregulated and competitive. “Less regulation prevents persecution by ensuring fair competition for religions within a society. Deregulating religious markets results in a rich pluralism where no single religion can monopolise religious activity, and all religions can compete on a level playing field” (:636).



Grim and Finke distinguish two agents of religious regulation: government and social bodies. Government's regulation of religion is defined as "the restrictions placed on the practice, profession, or selection of religion by the official laws, policies, or administrative actions of the state." What we are interested in as a proxy measure for xenophobia is the other form, namely the social regulation of religion, which is defined as "the restrictions placed on the practice, profession, or selection of religion by other religious groups, associations, or the culture at large" (:645).

This form of regulation might not be completely disconnected from state regulation. It might be tolerated or even encouraged, but it is not formally sanctioned or implemented by government action. The nature of social regulation can be extremely subtle, arising from the pervasive norms and culture of the larger society, but its extremes would be blatant acts of controlling religion. Its origin is often religion: religions, or cartels and alliances of religions that are regulating other religions in order to gain a competitive advantage.

The elements used for measuring the social regulation of religion index are societal attitudes toward non-traditional religions, conversion, and proselytism, as well as negative attitudes of social movements and religious institutions toward other religious groups, especially new, foreign and minority religions (:646).

It is important to note that Grim and Finke use a narrower definition of religious persecution than is used in this paper. They limit it to the more violent forms, namely "physical abuse or displacement due to one's religious practices, profession, or affiliation", and define it as a form of social conflict that involves more than religious opposition or a denial of personal rights, where the targeted group is identified by religion (:643).

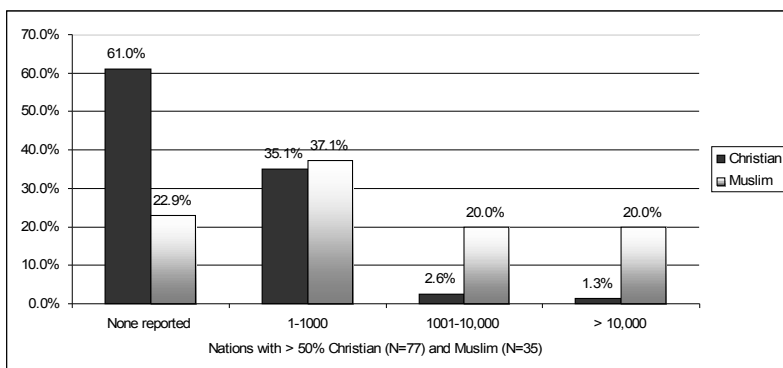
The main source of the data used by Grim and Finke is the 2003 International Religious Freedom Report of the United States of America's State Department. The advantage of this source compared to other cross-national data sources is discussed, establishing its credibility and limited bias. The data was reliably coded according to sociological standards. The analysis was limited to 143 countries with populations of 2 million or more, of the 195 countries listed in the report. The United States of America is not included in the report (:640-643).

The coders of the country reports estimated the number of people who were physically abused or displaced due to their religion, using six categories, starting with 0 for none, 1-10 people, etc., up to 1,001-10,000, and more than 10,000 people.

## 1.2 Findings

The following global profile of religious persecution emerges:

- Of the 143 countries included in the study, 77 have documented cases of religious persecution according to the above definition.
- Religious persecution is evident in every region of the globe, but is far greater in the Middle East and South Asia, where only 3 out of 24 countries have no record of religious persecution. Over half of the countries in Africa and East Asia reported at least some form of persecution, while in Europe and the Western Hemisphere it was still 40%.
- The global intensity of persecution is high, considering that 25 countries had more than 1,000 people abused or displaced, while in 14 of those countries the level of persecution exceeded 10,000 persons.
- Religious persecution is present regardless of a country's predominant religion.
- Of specific interest for our topic is a comparison of countries (*see Figure 1*) in which the majority of the population is Christian (77) or Muslim (35). There is no big difference in low- to mid-level persecution (between 1-1,000 persons affected) in both sets of countries: 35.1% of Christian-majority countries and 37.1% of Muslim-majority countries. However there was a stark difference in high-level persecution. Persecution of more than 1,000 persons is present in 40% of Muslim-majority countries compared to 3.9% of Christian-majority countries. But there are also Muslim-majority countries with no persecution (22.9% compared to 61% of Christian-majority countries) (:645).

**Figure 1:** Level of persecution in countries with Christian or Muslim majorities

(Grim & Finke 2007:645)

The examination of the various variables and their associations leads to some relevant observations:

- The percentage shares of Christians and Muslims in a population have effects working in opposite directions (:649-650). The adoption of religious law (mostly Shari'a law) and the percentage of Muslims in a country can be positively associated with the social regulation of religion. The percentage of Christians, however, is negatively associated with a government regulation of religion.
- The regulation of religion results in higher levels of persecution (abuse and displacement of people based on their religious affiliation), regardless of a country's majority religion (:652).

In the discussion of their findings Grim and Finke focus on the cycle of regulation and persecution (*see Figure 2*) and on interpreting the differences between Christian and Muslim dominated countries.

- The economies of religion model illustrates an ongoing cycle: social pressures from competing religions, social movements, and institutions can prompt increased regulation; increased regulation holds the potential for unleashing persecution from or condoned by the state, and this persecution can stimulate greater social regulation in response (:652).

*Figure 2: The cycle of persecution*



- In their effort to explain why predominantly Muslim countries have far higher levels of religious persecution and why social regulation increases as the percentage of Muslims in a country rises and government regulation declines as the percentage of Christians increases, Grim and Finke point to the need to understand differing views on how religion should be regulated – or not regulated. They propose that one of the key differences is that Christian tradition looks to the state as the legitimate authority, while Islamic tradition looks to the community of Muslims and its religious leaders. Once religious leaders have the authority to regulate other religions, the chance of religious persecution greatly increases. Grim and Finke propose to particularly explore two issues in future work. As previous research has shown, religious intolerance tends to increase in times of religious conflict, and firstly they pose the question: “Is the increased regulation a response to perceived cultural and religious threats?” And secondly, “do the teachings, unique history, and organisational structure of the Muslim faith provide a foundation for greater regulation outside of the state?” (:653)
- Finally Grim and Finke call for a continued sorting out of the cultural and religious influences on social conflict: “We need to recognize that religion and ethnicity are separate concepts, with distinct effects, that require separate measures” (:653).

### 1.3 Evaluation

In closing this section let us ask: has the research by Grim and Finke been helpful in understanding the relationship between xenophobia and religious persecution?

It has provided us with a proxy measure for xenophobia in its expression as social regulation of religion, which are the restrictions placed on the practice, profession, or selection of religion by other religious groups, associations, or the culture at large. There are three definite benefits to this approach: This measure is (i) independent of religious tradition, (ii) empirically supported and (iii) is based on a clear concept. The social regulation of religion can be measured in the societal attitudes towards non-traditional religions, conversion, and proselytism, as well as negative attitudes of social movements and religious institutions towards other religious groups, especially new, foreign and minority religions.

The main finding of Grim and Finke in view of our topic is that social regulation of religion is not the foremost factor directly associated with religious persecution. However it is an important one, as pressures created by the social forces seeking to regulate religion often lead to a state's regulation of religion. These regulatory actions contribute to religious persecution and can set up a vicious cycle of persecution once unleashed.

Another relevant finding of Grim and Finke is that predominantly Muslim countries have far higher levels of religious persecution than predominantly Christian countries.

The nature and strength of Grim and Finke's approach is that of a cross-national comparison of data on religious persecution. This is useful for gaining a global picture, drawing comparisons between nations and for establishing statistical probabilities of the association of regulation of religion and persecution.

By way of critique one might find Grim and Finke's definition of persecution too narrowly focused on physical harm and displacement, compared to the much broader definition by Tieszen used in this article. The statements of Grim and Finke on the spread of persecution must not be quoted as absolute statements, but can only be used within the confines of their parameters. With a broader definition of persecution the global pervasiveness of persecution would have been

found to be much larger. However it would have been more difficult to measure.

The finding that social regulation of religion only indirectly contributes to persecution by triggering governmental regulation of religion needs to be treated as a statement of global statistical probability and not as an absolute statement. In reality there are contexts where governmental regulation of religion is very low and social regulation of religion is very high. In some of these contexts this results in various degrees of direct religious persecution by social entities without a tightening of governmental restrictions.

Another critique might be the lack of a definition of religion in Grim and Finke's paper, which certainly exists in Grim's PhD dissertation. Religion would need to be understood broadly as a technical term, including any worldview – even no religion – in order to cover secularist regulation of religion in the guise of tolerance.

The description and perception of religion in market terminology by the religious economies model, while providing useful insights within its parameters, lacks the deeper understanding of religions which can only be attained by examining them inside out, from their own meta-centres. For example, Islam does not see itself as merely a religion in the sense of modern Western definitions, but rather as an integral and holistic system of society.

So while Grim and Finke have provided a ground breaking new model for understanding religious persecution which leads to useful insights, there are obvious limitations, which call for supplementary explanation and differentiation.

These insights will now be tested by some case studies using a different data source.

## **2. Assessing the role of xenophobia in religious persecution - case studies from contexts of Christian-Muslim convivence**

Probably the most representative, comparative and current data set available on religious freedom and persecution has been produced over several years by the survey conducted under the direction of Paul Marshall by the Center for Religious Freedom of the Hudson Institute.

The 500-page report contains 101 country profiles covering 95% of the world's population.

## 2.1 Sources and methodology

I intend to scrutinise a selection of the reports, in order to establish the role of xenophobia in discriminatory legislation, infringement of religious rights, and immoral actions of society which in some cases lead to the murder of fellow human beings for reasons including religious factors.

For the compilation of the country profiles Marshall adapted and expanded a checklist of criteria originally developed by Willy Fautré of Human Rights without Frontiers. The checklist attempts to summarise the various possible dimensions of religious freedom and broadly follows the criteria set by international human rights standards.

The country profiles were written by a whole team of authors and further processed in a co-operative manner. They follow clear definitions of the issues, and the authors operated with a published set of criteria for a coherent narrative and a quite comprehensive set of questions on the infringements of religious freedom rights. The checklist of elements of religious freedom (Marshall 2008:451-476) contains between 4 and 29 different questions on each of the following ten categories, making a total of 122 questions on the right of individuals to freedom of conscience, freedom of worship, freedom of clergy, right of self-government by religious bodies, freedom of religious education and instruction, right to social participation, equality/non-discrimination of individuals, equality/non-discrimination of communities and institutions, religious and economic freedom, and incitement against religious groups. The last category seems of the highest relevance for our study.

The approach of Marshall's reference work has set a standard for country profiles which should be taken as a benchmark.

Marshall provides a Religious Freedom Score for each country on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being the most free and 7 the least free. These are estimates of the team of authors of the respective country profile.

In addition Marshall has used Grim and Finke's set of questions, asked the authors of country profiles to respond to them in 2007, and independently calculated indexes on government regulation, government favouritism, and social regulation for each country. These are expressed on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 meaning none and 10 a strong degree on one of those indexes.

In order to identify the countries with the least religious freedom and the highest social regulation of religion, I pool the 20 countries scoring 6 or 7 on Marshall's religious freedom scale and the additional 7 countries scoring higher than 9 for at least a region of that country on Grim and Finke's Social Regulation of Religion Index.<sup>3</sup> There is a very high degree of convergence.

For the purpose of understanding religious persecution in a context where Christians and Muslims live together, we can ignore a number of countries on the resulting list. Where Christians or Muslims form a part of the populations of these countries and suffer persecution, they usually do so from a third religion or ideology dominant in that country. But those country profiles usually do not provide us with any relevant information on xenophobia between Christians and Muslims. So we can safely exclude Sri Lanka, China, Burma/Myanmar, North Korea, Vietnam, and Tibet.

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<sup>3</sup> In the Grim and Finke indexes particular states or provinces with a more extreme restriction of religious freedom are listed separately in addition to nations. In this paper they are only counted as a separate entity if the larger entity to which they belong is not contained in the sample. Otherwise they are counted as one entity.



**Figure 3:** Muslim- or Christian-majority entities with highest SRI or lowest religious freedom

Country or region	Grim indexes			Marshall	Christian	Muslim
	SRI	GRI	GFI	Score	%	%
Saudi Arabia	10.0	10.0	10.0	7	0.0%	100%
Sudan (Southern & Darfur)	10.0	9.1	10.0	7	23.0%	65%
Pakistan (Punjab)	10.0	8.6	9.6			
Malaysia (Panang)	10.0	8.6	9.0	4	10.0%	60%
Iran	10.0	8.3	9.3	7	0.5%	98%
Palestinian areas	10.0	7.8	8.3	6	~2.0%	~93%
Iraq	10.0	7.8	8.2	7	*3.2%	95%
Afghanistan (Southern)	10.0	6.9	9.2	6	< 1.0%	99%
Pakistan (whole country)	9.5	8.6	9.6	6	2.0%	92%
Nigeria (Sharia states)	9.3	9.4	8.3	5	45-50%	45-50%
Bangladesh (Dhaka)	9.3	7.7	7.6	6	< 1.0%	83%
Uzbekistan	9.3	7.5	8.0	7	4.0%	70%
Indonesia (Aceh)	9.3	7.5	3.5	5	13.0%	83%
Comoros	9.3	6.9	7.8	5	2.0%	98%
Greece	9.3	2.2	10.0	3	95.5%	4%
Romania	9.3	2.2	10.0	3	81.0%	1%
Thailand (Pattani province)	9.3	0	7.3	3	0.7%	4.6%
Mauritania	8.8	9.4	10.0	6	1.0%	99%
Turkmenistan	6.8	9.2	8.8	7	5.0%	90%
Maldives	6.8	8.3	10.0	7	< 0.5%	99%
Eritrea	5.8	9.4	6.8	7	+47.0%	48%
Belarus	2.6	9.4	1.5	6	71.0%	0.3%

\* taken from World Christian Encyclopedia 2000  
SRI = Social Regulation of Religion Index  
GRI = Government Regulation of Religion Index  
GFI = Government Favoritism of Religion Index  
Marshall Score = Religious Freedom Rating

## 2.2 Analysis of country profiles

If one compares how the entries of the Social Regulation of Religion Index (SRI) and the Government Regulation of Religion Index (GRI) relate to each other in the remaining list of countries, we find that in most instances the SRI is higher than the GRI. Besides the case of Saudi Arabia where both scores are at 10, there is a large group of 15 countries where the SRI is higher than the GRI and a small group of 5 where the SRI is smaller than the GRI. The SRI is higher in all but one case of the 15 cases that have a SRI between 9 and 10. The exceptions are the Shari'a states of Nigeria, where the GRI of 9.4 is just slightly higher than the SRI of 9.3. But in 3 cases, the GRI ranges at a high 6.9-9.4. The exceptions are the Muslim dominated Pattani province in Thailand, where the GRI is 0, and two countries with a majority Christian population, Greece and Romania that both have a low GRI of 2.2. The second group of 5 cases in this sample, where the GRI is higher than the SRI, all have an SRI below 9. This means they have been included in this sample because of a Marshall Religious Freedom Rating of 6-7. This is reflected in their correspondingly high GRI scores of 8.3-9.4.

17 of the 21 countries or areas in this sample have clear and often overwhelming Muslim majorities, three have overwhelming Christian majorities of the Orthodox variety, and in only one country, namely Eritrea, neither has a majority.

The three Christian majority population nations Greece, Romania and Belarus are considered first.

**Belarus**, with a highly authoritarian regime, was chosen for this list only because of its score of 6 in Marshall's Religious Freedom Rating. This corresponds with a high score of 9.4 in government regulation, while social regulation scores at a comparatively low 2.7.<sup>4</sup>

In **Greece**, the Greek Orthodox Church is represented by 87% of the population and is being favoured as well as the small minority of the Turcophone Muslim Community in Western Thrace, where Shari'a

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<sup>4</sup> The information on the individual countries represents a summary including verbatim quotes of the original text of Marshall 2008, particularly in view of the elements used as criteria of the Social Restriction of Religion Index, at times followed by a clearly distinguished brief evaluation of the results. Therefore no references are given for material from Marshall as it can be easily found in the respective country profiles which are seldom longer than four pages.

law regulates family and civic issues. However all other religious groups, from divergent Orthodox, or Protestant to other Muslim groups had to fight at the European Court of Human Rights to gain their rights according to European standards.

In **Romania** the Romanian Orthodox Church with 65% adherents “uses its dominant role to influence the majority of the population, policy makers and low-level government officials.” This domination leads to a “reluctance to tolerate other religions ..., contributing to a culture of intolerance, including sporadic violence.” However no cases of persecution against the 1% Muslim minority are reported in this country profile.

While in Greece and Romania the social regulation of religion is quite high, government regulation remains in fact rather low. Thus, high social regulation does not necessarily have to lead to high government regulation of religion.

Next we turn to the one nation in which the inhabitants are evenly split between Christianity and Islam. The small country of **Eritrea**, whose government is influenced by Marxist ideology, is given a Religious Freedom Rating of 7 by Marshall, because of its extremely high GRI (9.4). Religion is repressed because the government is afraid that people might give a higher allegiance to God than to the state's instructions. The country profile does not give any evidence of xenophobia in this society, while the SRI of 5.8 indicates that it is present. Xenophobia seems to be completely overshadowed in this report by the government's anxiety against and treatment of adherents of religions which could be classified as ideological xenophobia.

In our sample of countries scoring worst regarding religious freedom, we now consider some of the 17 Muslim majority countries or sub-regions, while skipping those where the country profiles provided no or very little evidence of xenophobia.

In the Kingdom of **Saudi Arabia** religious freedom does not exist. Social regulation, government regulation and government favouritism score a full 10 on Grim's indexes. All 24 million citizens must be Muslim, and the Wahhabi brand of Sunni Islam is the state ideology which is vigorously propagated at home and abroad. Other forms of Islam face discrimination, and all public practice of any religion other than Islam is strictly forbidden. Saudi government

school textbooks still contain hate language directed at members of other religious brands after so far inadequate attempts to purge these textbooks in response to pressure from abroad. In 2006 instances were documented where students were instructed “to 'hate' Christians, Jews, and non-Wahhabi Muslims and to treat them as 'enemies'.” The reader of this profile cannot escape the impression created of an institutionalised fear of any deviation from the state proclaimed brand, a fear of the “religious other”, which expresses itself in the most rigid and harsh measures.

The Punjab province in **Pakistan** with an SRI of 10 exceeds the national SRI of 9.5. Pakistan is ruled by the military and has a police force that seems to be a law unto itself. Islam is the state religion and 95% of the population are Muslims. The relations between many of Pakistan's religious communities remain tense and dangerous. Christians and Ahmadis are frequently the victims of religious vandalism and violence organised by Islamist extremists. As Christians are concentrated in the Punjab, this explains the higher SRI score for this region. The penal code against blasphemy is seriously abused by false accusations against non-Muslims. Since 1980 at least 23 people involved in cases of blasphemy have been murdered. Pakistan's Muslim majority is split into more than 70 Islamic sects which are doctrinally and politically opposed to one another, with spiralling violence evident between Sunni and Shiite factions. The details that emerge about the social regulation of religion bear many xenophobic traits, particularly in view of the “religious other”, so that the SRI score is well substantiated.

**Iran** has an overwhelmingly Muslim population of about 70 million, with 89% Shiite and 9% Sunni. Shiite Islam can be said to be the state religion. The narrative of the country profile provides evidence of Shiite xenophobic violence against the large Sunni minority. Otherwise the high degree of xenophobia suggested by a SRI of 10 is overshadowed by the details of government regulation of religion – particularly regarding Baha'i, Christians and Jews – even though that has the slightly lower score of 8.3.<sup>5</sup>

The **Palestinian areas** with a small population of 4 million also score 10 on the SRI, while government regulation is at 7.8. Muslims constitute about 93% of the population. While all Palestinians suffer

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<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed report on religious freedom in Iran see Schirmacher 2009.

from repressive and anarchic conditions, the growth of more extreme forms of Islam has led to increased threats, intimidation, and harassment by radical Islamic groups. Land seizures of Christian-owned properties, bomb threats, torching and bombing of houses, churches and vehicles, and the murder of a Christian leader were reported between 2005 and 2007. The country profile gives clear evidence of unchecked social violence mainly against Christians, much of which clearly seems to be religiously motivated xenophobia and hatred in the context of anarchy.

In **Iraq** with an SRI of 10 and GRI of 7.8, the composition of the total population of about 28 million has been in flux due to wars and 10% or more emigration. The definitive majority are the Shiite Muslims numbering about 65%, who form the current government; Sunni Muslims constitute about 30%. 'Religious cleansing' of neighbourhoods, disproportionate suffering of the non-Muslim minorities, kidnappings, forcing of Christians under threat of death to either pay the Islamic *jizya* tax to the local mosque, to convert to Islam, or to leave, frequent attacks on apparently religious grounds against churches and individual Christians, are among the incidents reported. Individual and co-ordinated bombings of churches and targeted murders have intensified in frequency and brutality since 2006.<sup>6</sup> The narrative clearly witnesses large-scale religiously motivated xenophobic violence of Shia and Sunnis against each other, and both against Christians and adherents of other minority religions.

The **Shari'a states of Nigeria**, hold an SRI of 9.3 and a GRI of 9.4, far above the national figures of 2 and 3.9 respectively. Christians and Muslims each add up to 45-50% of the national population. While societal discrimination is widespread, and clashes frequently erupt among the country's many ethnic groups, the concern here is with the twelve states in the north and central region which have introduced Shari'a and impose Islam as the de facto official state religion in contravention of the federation's constitution. These activities have led to the death of 60,000 people, mainly Christians and traditionalists, as ethnic, political and economic conflicts are increasingly tied to religion. The authorities have been ineffectual in preventing attacks. Religious persecution emanates both from government regulation,

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<sup>6</sup> Reports in 2008 suggest the cleansing of Mossul of Christians indicating a further worsening of the situation.

such as punishing apostasy by death, as well as from social hostility towards Christians such as are manifested in the many child abductions, combined with forced marriages and conversion to Islam.

The capital of Bangladesh, **Dhaka**, has a higher SRI (9.3) than the rest of the country of 144 million inhabitants (6.2). Islam is the state religion. Despite the formal declaration of religious freedom for minority religions, there is an increasing anti-minority sentiment in the country. People belonging to minority groups have suffered hundreds of cases and various kinds of social discrimination and persecution. These include destruction of property, kidnapping, the murder of leadership, rape of young girls, and discrimination in education, employment, property rights, and forced conversion to Islam. Different Islamic groups arouse anti-minority and specifically anti-Christian sentiment. The narrative gives clear evidence of the social exploitation of religious and ethnic minorities, and of high level and highly visibly xenophobic hostility.

**Uzbekistan** (26 million inhabitants of which 70% are Muslims) is one of the most repressive of the former Soviet republics with an SRI of 9.3. Government strictly controls all religious activity of the Muslim majority as well as of Christian and other minorities. Muslim converts to Christianity have sometimes been the victims of unofficial kangaroo courts that were convened with the connivance of state officials. Religious freedom monitoring is effectively banned.

### 2.3 Evaluation of findings

The delimitations of the samples according to the two scales did not fully match. Probably countries with an SRI from 8 upward should have been included to match the group of countries with a Marshall Religious Freedom Rating of 6-7. The addition of nations or parts thereof with an SRI between 8 and 9 would have raised the size of our sample by 12 entities. The additional entities are listed in alphabetical order: Afghanistan, Kabylie in Algeria, Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, the metropolises Assiut, al-Minyan and Alexandria in Egypt, Georgia, India and particularly its state of Gujarat, Azraq in Jordan, the Beirut suburbs in Lebanon, Macedonia, Mauritania, and Turkey.

Not all narratives in our sample group gave evidence of the high degree of social regulation of religion indicated in the index, but most

did so with very explicit descriptions of religious persecution motivated by various forms of xenophobia, but mostly religious xenophobia. In cases where the narrative gave little or no evidence of social regulation of religion/xenophobia, the explanation for this lack could be twofold: either the attention of the country profilers was so absorbed by the high degree of government regulation of religion resulting in massive persecution that they largely or completely failed to describe the social regulation of religion which exists there as well. Or the government regulation of religion is of such a nature and so strong, that it by itself overshadows the existing social regulation of religion, and the latter can no longer be fully distinguished and isolated from it.

Among the entities examined, four major scenarios emerged. The first is that of the authoritarian state which turns against all religions, such as Belarus, or domesticates recognized majority and minority religions for nationalist interests and more fully turns against unrecognised religions, such as in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

The second scenario is that of an Orthodox Christianity being (quasi) the state religion trying to secure its monopoly in society by regulating all other religions, such as in Greece and Romania. While this results in low scale persecution, social regulation of religion/xenophobia is not documented in the narratives.

The third scenario is one in which government regulation of religion in a Muslim majority country overshadows the social regulation of religion. Three different degrees could be distinguished.

1. The Muslim state that almost fully institutionalises xenophobia by oppressively policing its citizens, such as in Sunni Saudi Arabia, or in Shiite Iran.
2. The Muslim state with very high regulation of religion that overshadows social regulation of religion, but where social regulation of religion is still visible in the form of societal anti-conversion pressure, such as in the Comoros, Mauritania and the Maldives.
3. State sponsored religiously motivated violence, such as in the civil war and genocidal [sic] attacks in Sudan. While the immediate agents are often social forces the overshadowing force still is the government.

The fourth scenario is one where xenophobia and social regulation of religion are clearly more dominant than government regulation. Again there are various degrees to that scenario:

- State tolerated religious vandalism as in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Xenophobia by Muslims against minority religions is clearly evident in these countries.
- A religious veneer over ethnic, political and economic conflict, which is unchecked by government, such as in the north and central regions of Nigeria.
- Post-war instability in which large scale mutual hostility between Shia and Sunnis, as well as attacks against religious minorities go unchecked, such as in Iraq.
- Unchecked religiously motivated violence in a context of anarchy, as in the Palestinian territories.
- Regional insurgencies and extremism turning against other religions in otherwise moderate nations, such as in Aceh (Indonesia) and in Pattani (Thailand).

There are also limitations to our analysis: we omitted the entities with a lesser degree of persecution and social regulation. Further, while the theories of Grim and Finke were largely confirmed, the source used was not always sufficiently geared towards our specific topic. What is needed for a deeper understanding of the relationship between religious persecution and xenophobia is a more detailed documentation of a particular context on the one hand and more fundamental reflection on the other hand. Choosing the latter, I will therefore next venture into some hermeneutical considerations on the religious other as a threat.

### **3. The “religious other” as a threat - hermeneutical considerations**

*Understanding the stranger – a practical hermeneutic*, is a work in German by the Heidelberg professor of theology Theo Sundermeier. It is a pioneering work emanating from a lifetime of research as a scholar of mission studies and years of inter-cultural experience in South Africa and Namibia. His insights helped me to understand why the “religious other” is often considered a threat and how this leads to persecution. His book is not about ethics and how to overcome



xenophobic violence, but on building the foundations for a non-xenophobic society by understanding the stranger and showing why certain societies and religions deal with strangers in a specific way.

The standard definition of the stranger according to Simmel is that of “the one coming from outside, the ex-territorial one, who is now close and seems strange to me” (quoted by Sundermeier 1996:12;139). Sundermeier holds that the attitude towards strangers of tribal societies is today still ingrained in many cultures, even in the West. Whoever comes from outside causes insecurity – to both sides – and is a latent threat. Tribal cultures mark a closed circle. This is the living space of true humans, who know the customs and laws which guarantee the flow of life. Outside the circle is the desert, the jungle, where danger is lurking. Whoever lives there, is often not even accepted as a human being, or only in a limited way. Consider why people are called dogs, pigs, monkeys, snakes or lesser creatures! The stranger afar is an enemy. He is to be killed, sacrificed or caught, in order to be subjugated. Tribal societies also know the stranger who has comes close as a guest, and the trader who takes up a middle position between the close and the distant stranger. As long as the trader is useful in maintaining and improving life by his trade he is allowed and tolerated to come and to go. The guest is the stranger who has come to stay, at least for a while. He is taken in and protected as a resident with lesser rights. In order to be considered this guest type of stranger, one does not have to come from abroad. It suffices not to be related to local residents and to have no right to local land. Such people may be granted the right to residence, but no other rights, and they will certainly not be considered part of the inner circle – usually for some generations even if they intermarry.

Much of what has been observed in religious persecution in the above narratives can be understood within this framework of tribalism.

Strangeness has two dimensions, it starts with the subjective impression of “otherness” and leads to the realisation of an objective reality (:140). The spontaneous non-reflected reaction to the encounter with a person from a different religion is subjective. The eye sees religious symbols or ceremonies, the ear hears unfamiliar chants, and the nose might smell unfamiliar odours such as incense. On a deeper level the realisation sets in that “the other” comes from an order

foreign to me to which I have no access. There is a fundamental difference which is only partly or not at all compatible with the culture or religion familiar to me. This is the reason why tribal cultures and religions strictly segregate strangers and are only partly willing to integrate them. This attitude was reflected in some of the narratives on religious persecution.

The reaction to a person who converts from one's own religion to another religion can also be explained against this background as the artificial creation of strangers by labelling them as "the other" (:143). The subjective impression of strangeness can be artificially amplified, or even manipulatively created. In a radical selection particular signs are filtered out, (which could be the colour of skin, origin, or race, but in this case the religious creed) and given symbolic value and negative connotation. There exists no interest in understanding "the other", but rather in creating a distance between oneself and "the other" who once was close and now has become a threat. Such acts of erecting boundaries form and strengthen identities. Within this mindset, it comes as no surprise that a clan member or even a family member is declared as being part of the enemies or even dead, because of a religious conversion.

Sundermeier's survey of historical models of understanding strangers could lead to further insights about religion and xenophobia but would take us too far from the topic of religious persecution.

How does Christianity relate to the tribal concept of the stranger? Sundermeier (:121-124) claims that based on the teaching of Jesus, "what you have done to the stranger (xenos) you have done unto me" (Matt 25:38-43), hospitality was highly respected among the early Christians and practised without discrimination. This universalisation of tribalism is exemplified in the admonition by the Tanzanian mother of the bride to her daughter at a traditional tribal wedding:

You know that it is the custom of our tribe to give food to anyone who will in future enter your hut. Our tribal custom limits that to tribal members. But remember now that you are a Christian! You will give anyone something to eat, where ever he or she might come from (M Wilson quoted by Sundermeier 1996:122).

The only boundary respected by Christians was that between faith and unbelief. And as faith and unbelief are often simultaneously present in one and the same person, that boundary goes right through the

individual. All other boundaries were obsolete for Christians. The danger in the history of the Church, according to Sundermeier has been the tendency to try to clearly define the boundary between unbelief and belief, to say who is in and who is out, and thus making an ecclesiastical tribal religion of Christianity.

Besides a lot of similarities that Islam has with Christianity, the marked difference in the perception of the stranger is, according to Sundermeier (:124-127), that in Islam no institution that could be compared to the Church exists, as religion and state are one and the same in Islam, at least in the original ideal. Therefore religious and state ordinances should be compatible. Where the Shari'a, the law revealed by Allah through the Koran and Sunna, reigns, there is the 'house of peace', outside there is the 'house of war', and in between the 'house of contract'. People are classified into three groups: Muslims, people of the book, and infidels. There the pattern of tribal religion and its respective actions repeats itself. The people of the book must become dhimmi, the infidels must be converted or killed. Sundermeier sees the essential problem of Islam not in the particular mixture of tolerance and intolerance, which in its time and context has actually been understood as progressive; the problem lies in the immutability of this principle. Here tribal thinking is not overcome from the inside out, but it is accorded ultimate validity on a global scale. As this structure appeals to deep-seated human emotions it is very effective.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Returning to the question posed at the beginning: what is the role of xenophobia in religious persecution in contexts where Christians and Muslims live together? We have been seeking an answer by applying three different methods, examining three different sources, two of which represent leading research on religious persecution.

Firstly, the development of indexes on religious regulation by Grim and Finke has provided us with comparative measurements. The data was gained by coding the 2003 International Religious Freedom Report of the United States of America's State Department. As a proxy measure for xenophobia we used the social regulation of religion, which are the restrictions placed on the practice, profession, or selection of religion by other religious groups, associations, or culture

at large. Particular attention was paid to societal attitudes toward non-traditional religions, conversion, and proselytism, as well as negative attitudes of social movements and religious institutions towards other religious groups, especially new, foreign and minority religions. We found that in a global comparison, the one factor that leads, with the highest statistical probability to religious persecution, is government regulation of religion, while social regulation of religion most frequently encourages the increase in government regulation of religion and thus indirectly contributes to religious persecution. As prevalent persecution in turn strengthens the social regulation of religion, a vicious cycle is created. In cross-national comparison it was found that Muslim majority states are disproportionately represented among the countries in which religious persecution is prevalent. Countries with a majority Muslim population have far higher levels of persecution than countries with majority Christian populations. The higher the percentage of Muslims in a country, the higher is usually the social regulation of religion or xenophobia, whereas the higher the percentage of Christians the lower usually the government regulation of religion.

In a second step these findings were crosschecked against the country profiles of the leading current reference work on religious freedom in the world by Marshall. The countries or provinces with the worst SRI scores were pooled as a control measure with those countries which received the worst religious freedom score by Marshall – this is a more general and less differentiated measure. The narratives on these 21 entities were examined for the evidence they provided on social regulation of religion and xenophobia specifically and how these related to the level of persecution. All narratives obviously showed high levels of religious persecution, usually of religious minorities. Most narratives also gave evidence of high levels of social regulation of religion and various forms of xenophobia. However some narratives did not give sufficiently detailed evidence of the high degree of social regulation of religion as was indicated in the index because government regulation of religion overshadowed the description of the situation. Four major scenarios emerged. The first is that of the authoritarian state which turns against all religions. The second scenario is that of Orthodox Christianity, being quasi a state religion, trying to secure its monopoly in society by regulating all other religions, yet xenophobia was not documented in the narratives.

The third scenario is one in which government regulation of religion in a Muslim majority country overshadows the social regulation of religion. Xenophobia expresses itself in different degrees. It is either institutionalised by the state, expressed in societal anti-conversion pressure or in state sponsored religious violence committed by social forces. The fourth scenario is one where xenophobia and social regulation of religion are clearly more dominant than government regulation of religion. This expresses itself in different degrees, from religious vandalism, hostilities, and conflict unchecked by the state in situations of war, post-war instability, and anarchy, to regional insurgencies and extremism, which turns against other religions in otherwise moderate nations.

We found that for a more detailed evaluation of the role of xenophobia in religious persecution in contexts where Christians and Muslims live together, more detailed documentation on specific contexts than that provided, would be needed. Ideally this should focus on the restrictions placed on the practice, profession, or selection of religion by other religious groups, associations, or culture at large. Furthermore, it should include explicitly detailed evidence on xenophobia and all elements used for measuring social regulation of religion such as societal attitudes towards non-traditional religions, conversion, and proselytism, as well as negative attitudes of social movements and religious institutions towards other religious groups, especially new, foreign and minority religions.

Instead of pursuing the route of more detailed information, we have instead chosen to explore whether some more fundamental hermeneutical considerations would provide further insights. Using the hermeneutics of Sundermeier in order to understand the stranger, we asked why the “religious other” is often perceived as a threat. In tribal societies the stranger is at worst an enemy who needs to be killed or at least subjugated, or the trader who is tolerated as long as he is useful, and at best a guest who is protected as a resident with lesser rights. This attitude towards strangers is today still ingrained in many cultures. Keeping these concepts in mind, it can be explained why the “religious other” is seen as a threat, as an enemy who may be the subject of persecution and discrimination. Those who convert to another religion are artificially made strangers by being labelled as “other”, which legitimises their persecution or murder. The distance thus created between oneself and the “other” protects against the

perceived threat and the boundaries erected strengthen identities. Sundermeier maintains that in Christian faith tribalism has been overcome from the inside out by the universalisation of tribalism – though there has historically been the danger of turning the Church into an ecclesiastical tribal religion – while in Islam tribalism is accorded ultimate validity on a global scale.

Thus the question posed at the beginning, whether religious persecution is an expression of xenophobia has been sufficiently substantiated by examining contexts of convivence of Christians and Muslims. There exists a high degree of xenophobia and religious persecution in many contexts where Christians and Muslims live side by side. Unfortunately, this is more often and frequently more violently, the case in Muslim majority countries or areas, with persecution experienced by Christians and other religious minorities, than in Christian majority contexts.

Religious persecution is therefore a matter of concern to be remedied and addressed in dialogue between Christians and Muslims. The elements described in measuring social regulation of religion would need particular attention: how could societal attitudes toward non-traditional religions be positively influenced? What can be done to promote the toleration of genuine religious conversion? The World Evangelical Alliance has asserted in a recent resolution on religious freedom that this must remain protected as a human right. What can be done to protect genuine witness of one's faith or the polite and respectful invitation of others to consider it, while distinguishing it from unethical proselytism? The WEA makes its contribution to a common Christian code of ethics on mission, calling their own to witness “with gentleness and respect” (Schirmmacher 2007). What can be done to overcome the negative attitudes of social movements and religious institutions towards other religious groups, especially new, foreign and minority religions? It might be worthwhile to explore whether the three aspects of convivence, of living together, which Sundermeier has suggested, could help on the road ahead: readiness to help, learning together and from each other, and celebrating festivals together.

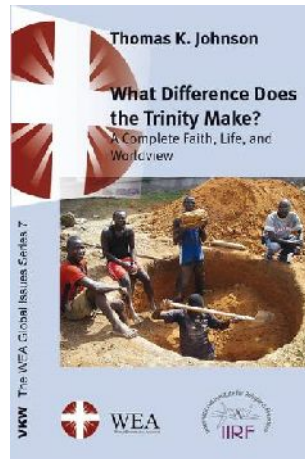
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# Christianity and democracy

Thomas Schirmmacher\*

## Abstract

The author traces the relationship between religious, and especially Christian, thought and ethics on the one hand and secular democracy on the other. While he concedes that the relationship between Christianity and democracy is and has been ambivalent, he demonstrates the significant contribution made by particularly the radical Reformations as well as religious minorities such as Judaism, towards the development of secular democracy. Majority religions, including the Catholic and Orthodox Churches and especially Islam, however, lagged and still lag behind in this regard, partly because of their more regimented internal structures.

**Keywords** Religious freedom, secular democracy, radical Protestants, enlightenment, minority religions, Christian ethics, Orthodox Church, Catholic Church, Islam, fundamentalism.

The first demands for religious freedom, freedom of conscience, freedom of the press, and universal male suffrage arose in England in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the radical wing of Protestantism. Michael Farris produced a comprehensive study regarding the early sources of religious freedom in the USA, which included countless sermons and tracts.<sup>1</sup> Sebastian Castellio, a former student of John Calvin, in 1554 spoke up against Calvin advocating a still rudimentary form of religious freedom (which would continue the punishment of the ‘godless’, i.e., the atheists). The English Baptist Leonard Busher<sup>2</sup> subsequently postulated the first known tract that called for complete religious freedom in 1614. The idea spread among Baptists and other

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\* Dr. theol. Dr. phil. Thomas Schirmmacher (\*1960) is Professor for Sociology of Religion at the University of Oradea, Romania, Professor of Ethics, Martin Bucer Seminary, Bonn, and Director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom of the World Evangelical Alliance, Bonn, Cape Town, Colombo. E-mail: info@bucer.de. This is an edited version of an article originally published in German in the journal *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, no. 14/2009, an insert of *Das Parlament*, the weekly paper of the German Parliament (‘Deutscher Bundestag’).

<sup>1</sup> Michael Farris, *From Tyndale to Madison*, Nashville 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Leonard Busher, *Religious peace*, Amsterdam 1614, London 1644.

‘dissenters’ in England, the Netherlands, and later in the US. It was the Baptist and spiritualist Roger Williams (1604-1685), co-founder in 1639 of the first American Baptist church with a Congregational structure, who in 1644 called for complete religious freedom.<sup>3</sup> He established on what later became Rhode Island the first constitution in which church and state were separated, assuring religious freedom – also for Jews and atheists, despite the fact that he was a friend of Christian mission. In 1652 slavery had been already abolished on Rhode Island. Rainer Prätorius hits the nail on the head when he said: “Not in spite of the fact, but rather because he was deeply religious, Williams called for a separation of politics and religion.”<sup>4</sup> The same applies for William Penn’s (1644-1718) subsequent ‘holy experiment’ in Pennsylvania.

## The stepchildren of the Reformation

The Protestant theologian and philosopher of religion Ernst Troeltsch<sup>5</sup> supported the view that the codification of human rights was not due to the established Protestant churches, but rather to Free Churches, sects, and spiritualists – from the Puritans to the Quakers – which were driven to the New World. “At this point the stepchildren of the Reformation finally had their moment in history.”<sup>6</sup> In the United States of America a number of factors combined and merged: the hard-earned freedom of religion and conscience that had been pioneered by the deeply religious Williams and Penn, the separation of church and state, the constitutional drafts (initially without freedom of religion) developed further by the Puritans and other Reformers, and the implementation of democracy for the territorial states by enlightened and deistic politicians, who translated the religious guidelines into secular law.

<sup>3</sup> Roger Williams, *The bloody tenent, for cause of conscience*, London 1644, see also *Christenings make not Christians*, London 1645.

<sup>4</sup> Rainer Prätorius, *In God we trust, Religion und Politik in den USA*, Munich 2003:35.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, “Puritanische Sektenfreiheit versus lutherische Volkskirche,” *Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologiegeschichte*. Vol. 9 (2002) 1:42–69.

<sup>6</sup> Ernst Troeltsch, *Die Bedeutung des Protestantismus für die Entstehung der modernen Welt*, München/Berlin 1911:62

The birth-hour of religious freedom – to exaggerate somewhat – represents therefore the struggle for freedom by Christian minorities against the Christian majority churches. In some non-Christian countries it represents the struggle for freedom of the religious minority movements versus the majority religion, as was the case with Buddhists versus Hindus in India. This also explains the ambivalence of historical Christianity with regard to democratic developments, “the ambivalence of Christian tolerance”<sup>7</sup> which makes it impossible to draw a straight line historically from Christianity to democracy.

Still too few studies exist regarding the question whether the close relationship between democracy and minority churches is purely historical or whether it still applies today. Jeff Haynes has presented an extensive analysis in which he discusses which religious groups and trends in present-day Africa promote or impede democracy.<sup>8</sup> He comes to the conclusion that the large, established churches frequently have bigger problems with democracy than the smaller, new churches. Although the latter are seemingly more ‘fundamentalist’, they are more democratic within, provide more prospects for internal promotion and are not as determined by a striving for hegemony. Haynes comes to similar conclusions regarding Islam in Africa.

## Judaism as a minority religion

The statement that it was religious, especially persecuted minority groups, which demanded democracy and freedom of religion, does not apply only to Christianity, but also, and particularly to Judaism, or – to choose a much more recent example of a religion which emerged only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – to the Bahá’i. Whether one should go so far as to state with Hannes Stein, “the modern constitutional state did not originate in Athens, but in Jerusalem”<sup>9</sup> is debatable. However, the idea of a federal constitution and a separation of priest and king did indeed originate from the Old Testament. It is not a coincidence that it was the eminent Jewish philosopher and reformer Moses Mendelssohn (1728-1786) who was the first in Europe to advocate the separation of church and state and freedom of religion – even if that did not yet

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<sup>7</sup> Rainer Forst, In: Manfred Brocker/Tine Stein (eds.), *Christentum und Demokratie*, Darmstadt 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Jeff Haynes, *Religion and politics in Africa*, London 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Hannes Stein, *Moses und die Offenbarung der Demokratie*, Berlin 1998:10.

include tolerance of the irreligious. The Jewish enlightenment emanating from Mendelssohn affected both secular enlightenment as well as Christianity and has a permanent place in the history of democracy.<sup>10</sup>

## Christianity and the Enlightenment

The anticlerical enlightenment of the French Revolution and the American Revolution, shaped by very devout and by deistic individuals, are linked by a profound commonality which one would not suspect at first glance. Both were directed against the ruling, mainline churches. Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) in his famous work on democracy in America posited that here deeply religious, mostly reformed movements had entered into an inseparable symbiosis with enlightened views.<sup>11</sup> The interplay between Christianity and the Enlightenment operated, as far as the emergence of democracy in America was concerned, with significantly less friction than in Europe, where it occurred only following numerous violent and bloody conflicts. This continues to have an effect even to the present, and perhaps explains the often-experienced lack of understanding between Europe and America.

## Christianity and the waves of democratisation

Neither would the Enlightenment have led to democracy had it not been able to draw on Christian concepts in Western civilisation, nor would Christianity have changed its political ethics or relinquished its comfortable position in the alliance between throne and altar without the enlightenment, since according to Manfred G. Schmidt “democracy has its roots primarily, yet not exclusively, in countries which were culturally influenced by Christianity and, in spite of a prolonged strained relationship between democracy and the Christian religions, received and further developed their guidelines for ordering social life from Christianity.”<sup>12</sup> Schmidt is referring here to one of the

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<sup>10</sup> S. Christoph Schulte, *Die jüdische Aufklärung*, Munich 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la Démocratie en Amérique*, 2 vols., Paris 1835, 1840, additionally Manfred G. Schmidt, *Demokratiethorien*, Wiesbaden 2008:113-131.

<sup>12</sup> M. Schmidt 422-423.

most distinguished Australian political scientists Graham Maddox.<sup>13</sup> Whilst he, as well as the American historian Page Smith<sup>14</sup> do not speak on their own account, the best known German representatives of this thesis are theologians such as William J. Hoyer or politicians such as Hans Maier.<sup>15</sup> This thesis has naturally not been left unchallenged.<sup>16</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> century state churches on the European continent were all too obviously allied with the monarchies against revolutionist aspirations or against the 1848 movement, to draw a mono-causal line from Christianity to democracy.

In 1993 Samuel P. Huntington drew up the widely accepted thesis of the four waves of democratisation.<sup>17</sup> In addition to sociological and economic factors, he observed an accumulation of the role of religious majority religion or denomination. Subsequently in a first wave (1828-1926) particularly Protestant countries became democracies. During the second wave (1943-1962) particularly Protestant, Catholic and Far Eastern countries, during the third wave (1974-1988) predominantly Catholic and Orthodox countries became democracies and during the fourth wave (after 1989/1990) all religions mentioned were affected again. Today, of the 88 free democracies worldwide, 79 or more than 90 percent are predominantly Christian. Besides this there exists one Jewish democracy and seven made up of predominantly Far Eastern religions, whereas in Mauritius and South Korea Christians constitute the second largest population segment. Mali is the only free, democratic country with a majority Muslim population.<sup>18</sup> One could also refer to Turkey and Indonesia, even though they are not ranked as 'free' countries on the lists mentioned.

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<sup>13</sup> Graham Maddox, *Religion and the rise of democracy*, London/New York 1996.

<sup>14</sup> Page Smith, *Rediscovering Christianity. A history of modern democracy and the Christian ethic*, New York 1994.

<sup>15</sup> William J. Hoyer, *Demokratie und Christentum*, Münster 1999; Hans Maier, *Demokratischer Verfassungsstaat ohne Christentum – was wäre anders?*, St. Augustin 2006; see also in: M. Brocker/T. Stein; cf. as early as Hans Maier, *Kirche und Demokratie*, Freiburg 1979.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. the collection of essays with pro and contra, M. Brocker/T. Stein.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The third wave*, Norman 1993; cf. Samuel P. Huntington, "Religion und die dritte Welle," in: *Europäische Rundschau* 20 (Winter 1992) 1:47-65; Samuel P. Huntington, "After twenty years," in: *Journal of Democracy*, 8 (1997) 4:3-12.

<sup>18</sup> Classification according to [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org); for quality cf. M. Schmidt,

Is it coincidence that the correlation between religious orientation and the ability to democratise repeated itself after the fall of the Soviet empire? Is it coincidence that the secular, Protestant and Catholic countries formerly under the influence of the Soviet Union fairly quickly became functioning democratic states, the orthodox countries did so only partly (democracy remained incomplete in Russia, Georgia, Montenegro and Macedonia ) and the Islamic countries did not at all?

## Islamic countries

This is not to say that Islamic countries cannot in principle be democratised (Mali has refuted this since 1991). The point here is not to find reasons for a sense of superiority because of some historical advantages of Christianity. The failure of large parts of Christianity in view of National Socialism<sup>19</sup> is a reminder to Christians of the words of the apostle Paul: “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor 10:12). Democrats, including Christian democrats, can only be filled with the wish for Muslim states to also become democratic states.<sup>20</sup>

Research has to date neglected to examine more precisely what, in the Islamic cultures, obstructs the establishment of democracy and what type of impact different theological and cultural versions of Islam have on the political structure. Naturally, it can be assumed that the configuration of the Turkish, Persian, Arabic and Asian Islam influenced the degree of democratisation and freedom in the countries which they dominated.

However, the question whether parallels to intra-Christian development exist in Islam has barely been pursued, that is, whether Islamic minorities and sects do display greater openness towards democracy when compared to the respective majority representation of Islam

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381-386; 392-398 and further studies, *ibid.* 417, 422.

<sup>19</sup> See Thomas Schirrmacher, *Hitlers Kriegerreligion*, 2 vols. Bonn 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Moataz Fattah, *Democratic values in the Muslim world*, London 2006; Frédéric Volpi, *Democratization in the Muslim world*, London 2007; Larry Diamond, *The spirit of democracy*, New York 2008; as a plea: Benazir Bhutto, *Reconciliation*, London 2008; cf. critical analysis Franco Burgi, *Export of democracy to the Arab world*, Munich 2007.

## Political ethics and internal structures of the denominations

John Witte referred to the fact that as a general rule support for democracy in political ethics preceded the major waves of the democratisation of states with a certain denominational majority.<sup>21</sup> Is it coincidence that the turning point of the Catholic Church towards freedom of religion and democracy during the Second Vatican Council, between 1974 and 1990, was preceded by a third world-wide wave of democratisation, which included many Catholic countries in Europe and Latin America? I do not want to establish a direct interdependence here, but surely nobody would seriously dispute that the theology of the largest religious community in the world influences the political realities of its supporters.

Since the orthodox theology found it most difficult to adopt a post-enlightenment ethic, it would hardly be surprising to find that amongst the Christian countries, orthodox countries struggled most with the concept of a free democracy, although in the meantime parliaments (and governments) are freely elected there too. Some of these countries still show significant defects in democracy, for instance autocracy (in Russia), or restricted freedom of religion (in Greece). At the same time, the recognisably progressing reform of theology and the political ethics of orthodox churches towards human rights and democratic forms of government<sup>22</sup> would give reason for hope that democracy in the orthodox countries will become stronger and more free.

A perusal of the outlines of ethics by German-speaking Christian theologians of all denominations for the last 20 years reveals that no one advocates an undemocratic form of government or a form of Christian theocracy. I consider democracy as characterised by an

<sup>21</sup> John Witte (ed.), *Christianity and democracy in global context*, Boulder 1993.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. for the Greek Orthodox Church Konstantin Delikostantis, "Die Menschenrechte im Kontext der orthodoxen Theologie," *Ökumenische Rundschau* 56 (2007):19-35; Konstantin Delikostantis, "Hē orthodoxia hōs protasē zōēs syllogikos tomos," Akritas 1993; for the Russian Orthodox Church Rudolf Uertz, "Menschenrechte, Demokratie und Rechtsstaat in der Sozialdoktrin," in: Rudolf Uertz/Lars Peter Schmidt (ed.), *Beginn einer neuen Ara?*, Moskau/Bonn 2004; Rudolf Uertz/Lars Peter Schmidt, *Die Grundlagen der Lehre der Russischen Orthodoxen Kirche über die Würde, die Freiheit und die Menschenrechte*, Moskau 2008.

election of parliament and government through free elections, a constitutional state, i.e. the separation of powers and the verifiable adherence of governmental action to law and justice, independent courts and an effective opposition. It is also a situation in which the constitutional state affords and protects human rights and the rights of all citizens including minorities and the separation of church and state including freedom of religion.<sup>23</sup>

The perusal of equivalent English-language documents reveals the same. Concepts of political ethics by Christian theologians, who do not depict democracy as the best form of government, originate either from countries that are not free or from an Orthodox context, and fortunately, according to my understanding, no new examples have been added to the list in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The fact that in its ethics the largest religion in the world became almost completely involved in the most complicated and youngest form of government in history, is an as yet unwritten success story.

## The internal structure of denominations

Added to the question of political ethics, must be that of the internal structure of Christian confessions. The French political philosopher Montesquieu (1689-1755), in his magnum opus, already held the view that the monarchy tended to suit Catholicism, whereas the republic suited Protestantism better.<sup>24</sup> For a long period of time he seemed to be correct, but an increasing democratisation of Catholic countries gradually made a differentiation necessary.

However, at this point we have to return to the role of the minority and free churches. The first constitution in history on which a state was founded was that of what later became Connecticut (1639) in the United States of America (USA). This happened only a few years before Rhodes Island was founded. It is an obvious example of the influence of Congregationalism, to which the majority of the inhabitants belonged.<sup>25</sup> The pace of the development of democracy

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. the numerous versions of democracy and the question of what constitutes it in M. Schmidt and Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*, London 1999.

<sup>24</sup> M. Schmidt: 77, on Montesquieu in general 66-79.

<sup>25</sup> See also R. Prätorius:32-34 and W. Hoye:143-145; Willam J. Hoye, "Neuenglischer Puritanismus als Quelle moderner Demokratie," in: M. Broucker/T. Stein:99-102.



was more rapid in Reformed countries with Congregational or Presbyterian Church structures, such as the USA, Switzerland and the Netherlands.

The Evangelicals were, according to Marcia Pally, the “backbone of the civic-democratic development”<sup>26</sup> in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in the USA, because they themselves were congregationally structured, and promoted communal development. They were anti-authoritarian and characterised by a strong individualism. And finally by virtue of their anti-racist past<sup>27</sup> they emerged as supporters of black churches and female preachers.

It is evident that as part of the overall impetus of the waves of democratisation, the more alike the internal structures of Christian denominations were, the more expeditiously they came to terms with enlightened democratic states. The more lay people participated in the decision-making and the more the churches were organised through elections from bottom to top, the sooner denominations did an about-face on a global scale. In only one instance does this equation fail: theoretically the Catholic countries should have been seized by the democratisation wave *after* the Orthodox countries.

Lest this be understood as one-sided, confessional partisanship, it should be pointed out that, in the case of the German constitution, the above mechanism did not apply. One must differentiate between the official teaching of a denomination on the one hand and the acts of the laity on the other: Catholic laypersons frequently acted much earlier than their church in favour of the separation of church and state. Especially through the Centre party political Catholics supported the Weimar Republic. Many committed Catholic laypeople contributed formatively to the development of the constitution of the German Federal Republic.

This was not the case in the same way with Protestants. Although it can be said about the Anglo-Saxon countries at the time of World War II and before: “In the churches of the USA, but also of Great Britain, democracy and Christianity were practically viewed as being

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<sup>26</sup> Marcia Pally, *Die hintergründige Religion*, Berlin 2008:46, 88 et al.

<sup>27</sup> Chuck Stetson (ed.), *Creating the better hour*, Macon 2007; Ian Bradley, *The Evangelical impact on the Victorians*, Oxford 2006; cf. Thomas Schirrmacher, *Rassismus*, Holzgerlingen 2009 and see also *Multikulturelle Gesellschaft*, Holzgerlingen 2006.

synonyms.”<sup>28</sup> This view naturally reached Germany via the Allied Powers, with the exertion of more or less gentle pressure. Yet, at the time of the development of the Constitution, the Protestant Church still struggled to accept democracy. It was not until 1985 that the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), in a famous memorandum<sup>29</sup> accepted liberal democracy without ‘ifs and buts.’

## Evangelicals, Christian fundamentalists and democracy

Martin Riesebrodt maintains that all fundamentalists are hostile towards democracy: “True fundamentalists are never democrats on principle, but from expediency.”<sup>30</sup> However, this hypothesis cannot be proven by either an historical or an empirical investigation. Neither does the history of democracy prove him correct – numerous fundamentalists formed part of its inception – nor does the present. One must look at each group individually to assess their capacity for democracy. Conceding that the concept of fundamentalism is hardly suitable for scholarly purposes – fundamentalists are always ‘the others’ – I would nevertheless agree to presuppose the fundamentalist character of certain movements.

Let us for instance take Brazilian Evangelicals, who are largely influenced by Pentecostalism. According to research undertaken in Brazil in 2003 by the sociologist Alexandre Fonseca<sup>31</sup>, 25 of the 57 Evangelical members of congress belonged to opposition parties, while 32 belonged to the ruling labour party. They represented 11 percent of the members of congress, which corresponds approximately with the percentage of Evangelicals that make up the country’s population. In Brazil it is possible to accumulate votes for designated candidates. Fonseca established a high degree of backing for

<sup>28</sup> M. Greschat (ed.), *Christentum und Demokratie im 20. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart 1992:VIII.

<sup>29</sup> *Evangelische Kirche und freiheitliche Demokratie*, Gütersloh 1986, 1985; cf. in addition Eberhard Jüngel, *Evangelische Christen in unserer Demokratie*, Gütersloh 1986.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Riesebrodt, *Die Rückkehr der Religion*, Munich 2001:89.

<sup>31</sup> Alexandre Brasil Fonseca, *Evangélicos e mídia no Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro 2003; see also Religion and “Democracy in Brazil,” in: Paul Freston (ed.), *Evangelical Christianity and democracy in Latin America*, Oxford, New York 2008.

democracy, something that is not always found with the Catholic Church. The fact that *all* democratic parties are regarded as places for Christian involvement shows that the secular character of the state and the parties has been accepted.

In South Korea Evangelicals constitute 15 percent of the entire population, accounting for the largest section among Protestants. When benchmarked against German standards, it was found that they are predominantly fundamentalist-orientated, both among the Presbyterian and the Pentecostal wings. They live peacefully in a society in which the majority of the population is Buddhist, stabilising the secular democracy.<sup>32</sup>

Recently sociological studies investigated the relationship between Evangelicals in the global south and politics, particularly with reference to democracy.<sup>33</sup> The outcome was altogether very positive; the support of dictators or tyrannical regimes remained the exception. This also shows that the 300–400 million Evangelicals living outside the USA cannot be equated with the 50 million living in the USA. In addition, it should be considered that among the Evangelicals in the USA, a significant number are Afro-Americans and Latinos and that even under George W. Bush 40 percent of the Evangelicals voted for the Democrats.<sup>34</sup> Evangelicals throughout the world, are politically divided into radical Evangelicals and conservative Evangelicals, with the radical Evangelicals inclined towards liberation theology in Latin America and India<sup>35</sup>, and in the USA (e.g. Ronald Sider and Jim Wallis) belonging to the strongest critics of the politics of George W. Bush.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Donald N. Clark, "Protestant Christianity and the State," in: Charles K. Armstrong (ed.), *Korean Society*, New York 2006; David Halloran Lumsdaine (ed.), *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Asia*, Oxford, New York 2008.

<sup>33</sup> See e.g. David Halloran Lumsdaine (ed.), *Evangelical Christianity and democracy in Asia*, Oxford, New York 2008; Terence O. Ranger (ed.), *Evangelical Christianity and democracy in Africa*, Oxford, New York 2006; cf. also Paul Gifford, *African Christianity*, Kampala (Uganda) 1999.

<sup>34</sup> Marcia Pally:54, 57.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. e.g. the Evangelical forerunner of the Indian ecology movement Ken Gnanakan, *Responsible Stewardship of God's Creation*, Bangalore 2004.

<sup>36</sup> Ronald J. Sider, *Scandal of Evangelical politics*, Grand Rapids 2008; Jim Wallis, "Dangerous Religion. George W. Bush's Theology of Empire," in:

If, to choose a different tool of assessment, one investigates the Christian ethics of Evangelical theologians – according to Riesebrodt’s definition also “fundamentalists”– all of them, for multiple reasons, advocate democracy, and that not only as a pretense. Richard Hempelmann has documented his hypothesis, that German Evangelicals are predominantly not fundamentalists and that Christian fundamentalism has no basis in Germany. He proved this by, among other things, stating that Christian minority parties such as the Pentecostal Party of Bible-believing Christians (Partei Bibeltreuer Christen [PBC]), or the Catholic Christian Centre (katholische Christliche Mitte) receive hardly any votes.<sup>37</sup> Added to this is the fact that their respective churches do not support these parties. A similar principle applies in the USA. The *Christian Reconstruction* movement is considered to be the only movement which theoretically wanted to create a Christian republic with binding biblical laws, as had been the case during the times of the founding fathers of the USA. The movement remained insignificant and barely survived the death of its founder.<sup>38</sup>

The problem of the Evangelical movement in its history and partly up to the present day, lies rather in the fact that Evangelicals shy away from politics and leave the shaping of society to others. For this very reason they are no threat to democracy (as long as one does not view the high number of non-voters as a threat to democracy). The Russian-German Evangelicals living in Germany, for example, often do not even work together with other Evangelicals. As they descended predominantly from the completely or partly pacifist Mennonite and Baptist traditions, they are, as far as violence and the malpractice of politics are concerned, ‘harmless’ churches. In a religious sense they may be fundamentalists, in the political sense they are certainly not.

If fundamentalism is defined by its attempt to re-establish the original condition of religion in the face of modernity, what emerges

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Bruce Ellis Benson, Peter Goodwin Heltzel (eds.), *Evangelicals and Empire*, Grand Rapids 2008; Randall Balmer, *Thy Kingdom come. How the Religious right distorts the faith and threatens America*, New York 2006.

<sup>37</sup> Reinhard Hempelmann, “Fundamentalismus,” *Materialdienst der EZW* 71 (2008) 7:243-244; cf. Thomas Schirrmacher, *Feindbild Islam. Am Beispiel der Partei „Christliche Mitte“*, Nürnberg 2003.

<sup>38</sup> E.g. M. Pally:55; for details see Thomas Schirrmacher, *Anfang und Ende von ‚Christian reconstruction‘ (1959-1995)*, Bonn 2001.

in the Christian realm with the ideal of the altogether a-political first church in Jerusalem, is a rather pacifistic movement.

## **Conclusion**

Despite much ambivalence in the relationship between Christianity and democracy, there are reasons why determined Christians and minority churches have called for secular democracy, have advanced it, and have helped to stabilize it.

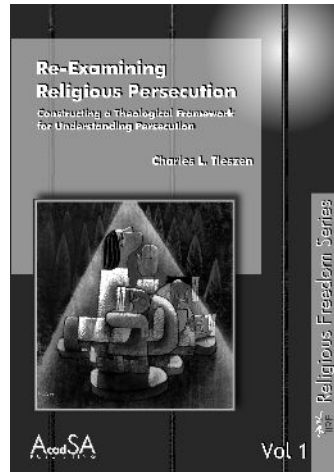
# Re-Examining Religious Persecution

Constructing a Theological Framework  
for Understanding Persecution

**Charles L. Tieszen**

This innovative study examines the shortcomings evinced by many modern studies of religious persecution. Noting the gaps in current theological reflection, Tieszen offers a theological framework in which the religious persecution of Christians can be properly and theologically understood and responded to. Perhaps most importantly, a definition of persecution is put forth that seeks to incorporate necessary and often over-looked elements.

Todd M. Johnson, Center for the Study of Global Christianity, South Hamilton, MA, USA



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### International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) of the World Evangelical Alliance

Friedrichstr. 38  
2nd Floor  
53111 Bonn  
**Germany**  
Bonn@iirf.eu

PO Box 535  
Edgemead 7407  
Cape Town  
**South Africa**  
CapeTown@iirf.eu

32, Ebenezer Place  
Dehiwela  
(Colombo)  
**Sri Lanka**  
Colombo@iirf.eu

## “Agonizing for you:” Christian responses to religious persecution

Charles L Tieszen\*

### Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to outline the biblically and theologically appropriate responses to the religious persecution of Christians. The responses of enduring, avoiding and resisting persecution as well as solidarity with the persecuted are discussed.

**Keywords** Persecution, responses, endurance, avoidance, resistance, solidarity.

### Introduction

A group of Muslims in northern Nigeria recently stopped cars along a road and forced the passengers inside to recite the shahāda (Islamic creed). Those who could do so were allowed to continue on their way. Those who could not recite the creed however, were beaten or killed. Given the religious demography of Nigeria, many Christians were involved and their inability and/or refusal to recite the shahāda precipitated many beatings and deaths. Their own response, in like manner, was to stop cars and force passengers to recite John 3:16. If these passengers were unable to recite the small portion of Scripture, as a number Muslims were unable to do, they too were beaten or killed (Glaser 2005; Boer 2003).

This situation, as do inter-religious tensions in Nigeria to this day, involves a number of ethnic, cultural, political, and theological issues. Theology alone may not eliminate conflicts like these, but the

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\* Dr Charles L Tieszen (\*1978) holds a PhD in Christian-Muslim Relations by of the University of Birmingham, U.K. and a BA degree from Simpson University in Redding, California. He also earned a MTh from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts and is a former research assistant at the seminary's Center for the Study of Global Christianity. E-mail: tieszen@gmail.com. This article is an adaptation of the last part of his book *Re-examining Religious Persecution: Constructing a Framework for Understanding Persecution* (Kempton Park: AcadSA, 2008). The American spelling is retained.

horrifying example recounted above does suggest that these Nigerian Christians did not have a means in which to think about and respond appropriately to the persecution that occurred in their context. Such a story not only illustrates the importance of theological reflection concerning persecution, but where none exists, it demonstrates that misunderstandings and inappropriate reactions will often result.

In other places (Tieszen 2008), we have examined in detail a theology of persecution. In the study that follows, and as a part of this theology, we wish to give special attention to the ways in which we might appropriately respond to religious persecution.

## **Enduring persecution**

The most important and clearest biblical directive concerning a response to persecution is perhaps that of enduring an expected event for the greater purposes of God. In this light, Christians are at times called to boldly persevere in the midst of persecution. At other times, God calls Christians to willingly face persecution. Biblical examples may help us understand responses like these, responses that might otherwise seem unnatural. With this in mind, consider the example of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who refused to bow before King Nebuchadnezzar's golden image (Dan 3:8-30). These men were fully aware of what would befall them if they chose not to abide by the king's wishes. Even so, they chose to face the persecution that would inevitably come as a consequence whether God spared them from it or not (Dan 3:16-18). Similarly, Paul, having been told by a prophet that he would be arrested and imprisoned if he chose to go to Jerusalem, was steadfast in his decision to travel to the city even if it meant persecution (Acts 21:10-13). Likewise, the church of Smyrna was warned in John's Revelation that they were to endure persecution. Yet, Christ instructs them to, "Be faithful, even to the point of death" (Rev 2:10).

Examples such as these demonstrate that there are times when it is God's will that his people face and endure persecution. For this reason, God tells Christians to respond with joy and consider themselves blessed when they experience it (Matt 5:10-12; 1 Thes 1:6; Jas 1:2; 1 Pet 3:14a, 4:13-14, 16). Since Christians will experience and often must endure persecution, they are also instructed to not worry about or be afraid of it (Luke 12:11-12; 1 Pet 3:14b). The Holy Spirit



will protect them and help them to stand strong. In this light, enduring persecution, when it is considered biblically and while it should not be considered separately from other responses, is “... by far, the most common response to persecution ...” (Penner 2004:133). This is perhaps best understood in light of a theological expectation of the event whereby Christians are directed to expect persecution as a part of following Christ (2 Tim 3:12; John 15:20).

While the most frequent biblical directive may be to endure persecution, it by no means points to an attitude whereby Christians should seek persecution out. While we see such efforts historically (Ignatius 1999; Latourette 2000:86, 149; Tucker 1983:57; Schirrmacher 2001: 57-59), it is difficult to reconcile them with the biblical message and it seems instead that there should be no macabre or brazen pursuit of persecution in order to elevate or glorify oneself. Persecution is meant to glorify God. In this sense, we have no biblical instruction or theological basis in which to pursue persecution as if our own spiritual agenda were at stake.

In like manner, although Christians are to consider themselves blessed when they must endure persecution, the mere experience of it is not at all times a mark of Christian spirituality or maturity. Examples in which Christians react to persecution with their own brands of violence illustrate, as our introduction above shows, a lack of discipleship, spirituality, and maturity in their ungodly response. The mark of Christian spirituality and maturity is seen, not in the fact that a Christian might experience persecution, but in the way in which they endure and choose to respond to it. Even so, practising such a response is the difficult part. We can only do so under the power of the Holy Spirit, knowing that such experiences are to be expected and that heavenly rewards await those who endure persecution with strength and godly dignity.

## **Avoiding persecution**

A theological expectation of persecution and a call to endure it notwithstanding, there are occasions and means in which God directs believers to avoid it as well. In this way, a call to endure persecution does not mean a weak, apathetic, and/or passive acceptance of the event. Biblically, the avoidance of religious persecution is seen as early as the book of 1 Kings. Here, Elijah predicts a drought that will

occur in Israel as judgment from God. Knowing that King Ahab will react negatively to this prophecy, God instructs Elijah to, "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan" (1 Kgs 17:3). By obeying God in this way, Elijah avoided persecution. In like manner, the Apostle Paul escaped persecution and possible martyrdom by being lowered from a city wall in a basket (Acts 9:23-25; 2 Cor 11:32-33). Jesus, too, avoided some persecution until it was his appointed time (Matt 12:14-15; John 7:30, 8:20, 8:59). In Matthew 10:23, he directs his disciples to flee to one city when they are persecuted in another. Though he was ultimately submitted to the will of the Father, he even prays in Luke 22:42 that he might be allowed to avoid his impending persecution and death. In the case of the Early Church, the very fact that it scattered as a result of persecution (i.e., Christians avoided it) demonstrates, not merely that such a response took place, but that it was warranted and directed by God (Acts 8:1, 11:19ff, 14:5-6).

For Elijah, it was God himself who told him to leave the area immediately and seek safety in the desert. Likewise, Jesus found it appropriate to hide or flee in order to avoid persecution at times. We also know in retrospect that the scattering of Christians in response to persecution was used by God to spread and grow the Church just as Paul saw his own fleeing as a part of fulfilling his God-given mission. In essence, there are certain times when God directs his people to avoid persecution. They do not do so out of fear, but because God leads them to do so (Penner 2004:132).

These examples suggest that at times the Church is meant to implement certain strategies that might aid it in its ability to avoid persecution. We see such godly strategies in a further example from the Early Church. Writing to those who questioned the avoidance of persecution, Tertullian, the second-third century African theologian, encouraged believers to be shrewd in the way in which they chose to worship. Groups of small numbers and night meetings may be in order if they wished to avoid persecution (Tertullian 1999:125). In other contexts, this sort of divinely appointed avoidance of persecution may require other types of secret worship services or certain efforts in contextualization – matters dependent upon context. There may even be occasions in which fleeing persecution or the threat of it is divinely warranted.

Furthermore, as Vernon Sterk points out, our efforts to appropriately propagate the gospel and ensure that conversion is not restricted to certain cultural and/or foreign parameters can perhaps be seen as an indirect method for avoiding what might otherwise be unnecessary persecution. With this in mind, there may in fact be times where our own misguided actions are the cause of persecution. As Sterk encourages, if the gospel and methods of outreach, mission, evangelism, and witness are contextualized, allowing seekers and converts to fully accept the gospel in their own culture, then they may be better able to withstand persecution when it comes. This might further help Christians to avoid persecution that might result from unnecessary cultural misunderstandings. In other words, “westernizing” people, for example, may result in persecution as a reaction to foreign and forced ideals. Contextualizing the gospel within a specific culture meets individuals at their own cultural level and may help to avoid unnecessary outbreaks of persecution as well (Sterk 1999:16).

In the end, what is important to note is that Christians must not avoid persecution out of fear or merely with thoughts of finding a more peaceful or tolerant environment. This is illustrated best when emigration is considered as a response and method of avoiding persecution. While in a sense the book of Acts shows the Early Church’s “emigration” as a way in which the Church spread or scattered, this is not a constant directive. This was a major issue for the churches in communist Eastern Europe (Kuzmič 1996:65–66). For Christians in these countries, their emigration was often carried out internally. In this case, individuals, “... isolate[d] themselves from the surrounding secular society ...” (:66). Additionally, those who emigrate internally,

... very often develop a ghetto mentality with a reactionary lifestyle. They are marked by a high degree of legalism and insulation that prevents them from having a positive ‘salt and light’ influence on their society (:66).

In the case of Eastern Europe, responding to persecution through internal emigration was even used in “... anti-Christian propaganda to prove the socially and mentally harmful effects of Christian faith” (:66).

More traditionally, physical or external emigration has been a consistent issue facing the churches of Western Asia and Northern Africa. Christians here, historically and presently, emigrate towards regions that they perceive to be more tolerant of their faith. While a

number of various issues stimulate this movement, persecution has often been a central motivation driving their desire to move to the perceived comfort and safety of another country. What these emigrants do not always realize however, is that even if they are able to successfully leave their homeland they will never fully escape persecution and hardship. Moreover, the churches they leave behind are left with an even greater burden of existing and maintaining a voice as an ever-increasing minority (Bailey and Bailey 2003:13-14; Sabella 1998:127-154). Thus, while emigration is understandable and may even be an entirely warranted response to religious persecution, it clearly requires the wisdom of God.

With this in mind, we see quite plainly a tension between the boldness required in enduring persecution and the creativity and wisdom required in avoiding it. Hence, there is a balance between a Spirit-led embrace and a Spirit-led avoidance of the event. While there is biblical evidence in support of the latter action, it is clear that it must be God who initiates such a response. While there are those who feel they can be of greater use if they are free from danger, they must ultimately submit to the will of God and his sovereign purposes in persecution. As Penner summarizes,

Flight is forbidden where obedience to God's commandments and Christ's commission and love for others would be jeopardized. The avoidance of distress and pain is not the supreme good. Obedience is, regardless of the cost (Penner 2004:134).

## **Resisting persecution**

Putting aside the tension between endurance and avoidance we describe above, there remain options which may be a part of these responses. In other words, as Christians endure and/or avoid persecution, they may also be called by God to resist it at the same time. This resistance of persecution indicates neither an acceptance nor an avoidance of persecution, but rather an action that seeks to stop the event. In this light, Glenn Penner writes, "There are times when it is appropriate to fight for one's legal rights" (:133). Thomas Schirmacher adds, "Christians are loyal citizens who seek the welfare of their state, country and people, but whenever the State tries to force them to dishonour God, they must obey God rather than man" (Schirmacher 2001:90).

Biblically, the Apostle Paul demonstrates resistance through his appellation to and use of Roman law. In this way, he questions the actions

of city magistrates who publicly beat him without a trial (Acts 16:36-39). He questions the legality of scourging him, a Roman citizen, when he has not yet been convicted of a crime (Acts 22:24-29). Facing persecution, Paul once again uses the law and his Roman citizenship to appeal to Caesar, knowing that doing so afforded him the right to a legal trial (Acts 25:10-11). With his knowledge of the law and his rights as a citizen of the Roman Empire, Paul is thus able to avoid persecution by resisting it. In fact, Jesus demonstrates this same concept by defending himself before his own tribunal (John 18:23). What these examples demonstrate is a biblical option to resist persecution. However, it is important to note that both Jesus and Paul exercised this choice under specific premises and for specific purposes. As Penner notes, “Like fleeing, [resisting persecution] is permissible unless it hinders the furtherance of the kingdom of God ... In Paul’s case, it could be argued that he defended his legal rights in order to further the kingdom of God” (Penner 2004:133). In the same way, Jesus defended himself, “... not to protest his [persecution] but as a testimony of his innocence” (:133).

In this light, Christians have a biblical precedent to resist persecution within certain parameters. In fact, Christians have a right to be angry with conditions of persecution. This attitude of righteous indignation should motivate them to work for change. As Peter Kuzmič implores,

There is a place for anger – not sighing negative litanies and being unhappy and destructive, but biblical holy indignation, a righteous outrage which, under the Lordship of Christ and motivated by Christian love, leads one to seek to transform the conditions which made one angry in the first place (Kuzmič 2004-2005:39).

Resistance like this might occur through legislative change which itself might occur through civil disobedience, publications, political lobbying, or public demonstrations (Penner 2004:133; Schlossberg 1991:166-168). The guidelines under which resistance must submit, however, remain important. As we saw in the example of Jesus and Paul, Christian resistance of religious persecution must not distort, diminish, or contradict the gospel, God’s purposes in persecution, Christ’s mission in the world, or the Holy Spirit’s leading to respond to persecution in another manner. Our unwillingness to submit to Christ’s will may even bear physical ramifications. Sometimes this is seen in secular venues where resisting persecution through state-funded or controlled departments can sometimes result in a policing of areas of religious restriction in such a way as to inappropriately align the Church with a particular state or

designate it as a “mission–protectorate” (Scherer 1998:66-67; Marshall 1998:67). Thus, just as inappropriately enduring or avoiding persecution can damage the name of Christ or one’s witness of him, so can inappropriately resisting persecution.

With these points in mind, resisting persecution under certain guidelines remains a viable option for Christians. Once again we see the importance of wisdom and discernment under the direction of the Holy Spirit. We are not called at all times to be subjected to ungodly treatment, nor are we at all times to shirk such treatment. Ultimately, God himself will defend his Church, but in the same way, there are times when God will lead his people to rise up in holy indignation and resist efforts to squelch his people.

## Solidarity with the persecuted

Finally, like resistance, showing solidarity with others in their experience of persecution can be done in congruence with avoiding or enduring persecution. At times, this is the divinely ordained responsibility of those already in the midst of intense persecution. At other times, perhaps most of the time in fact, it is the responsibility and call of those whose experience of persecution is less hostile who are thus in a better position to serve as advocates for others. Often, these are the ones who must respond to persecution by showing solidarity with fellow believers and advocating for them in prayer and resistance. As Kuzmič writes, “... solidarity with those who suffer is a Christian imperative” (Kuzmič 2004–2005:42). Schirmacher adds, “... committed efforts to aid persecuted Christians cannot be left up to a few enthusiasts, but, according [sic] the New Testament, is a central duty of the Christian Church” (Schirmacher 2001:14).

This concept is perhaps best illustrated by a companion of the Apostle Paul and a member of the Colossian church. In a letter to these believers, Paul writes, “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you all; he is always agonizing (*agōnizomenos*) for you in prayer, in order that you might stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God” (author’s translation of Col 4:12). In essence, as Epaphras prayed for his fellow believers and a church that was experiencing persecution, he agonized with their own experiences. He struggled in prayer on their behalf so that they might achieve the best that God had for them. This illustrates not only

prayer’s power, but the importance of showing solidarity with others through prayer so that they might persevere in persecution and might even be led by God to respond to their experiences in other, more specific ways. So it was for the Galatian church, too, when Paul urged them to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal 6:2). Similarly, the writer of Hebrews encouraged his readers to think of themselves as sharing in the literal persecution of those who were actually enduring it (Heb 13:3). By following these examples, so Christians might show solidarity with those experiencing persecution (Penner 2004:91-99).

While this response is important for those who most often experience mildly hostile persecution, it does not exclude other Christians from seeking solidarity through persecution. Christians whose persecution is intensely hostile can also show solidarity in the experience of others through prayer. This is best illustrated by the author’s own experience in northern India. After exploring some of the biblical theology of persecution at a local Christian training centre, Indian students were asked to share their experiences and receive prayer. In this way, American instructors could begin to prayerfully stand alongside their Indian brothers and sisters in their experiences of persecution. After doing so, these same Indian Christians, whose experience of persecution was far worse than that of those who taught them, asked if they could in turn pray for the American Christians so that they might show solidarity with them in their experience of persecution. While all those present were aware of the differences in persecution between the two groups represented, both stood alongside each other regardless of the varying degrees of hostility each Christian may have faced. The result was one of true community and reciprocal solidarity.

This point notwithstanding, it remains a primary responsibility of those whose experience of persecution is presently mild to stand for and with those whose experience is intensely hostile. It is these Christians who are better able to take action for and on behalf of those with more intense experiences. Additionally, without mitigating the power of prayer, Christians are in this way called to “... wherever and whenever possible ... engage in political advocacy and the pursuit of international justice ...” (Kuzmič 2004–2005:42). This, we might add, should be carried out not just within the Christian community, but “... for any other human beings whose freedom of conscience is violated” (:42; Boyd-MacMillan 2006:116). This means that Christians,

especially those whose experience of persecution may be mildly hostile and intermittent, cannot be willing to kneel in the quietness and relative safety of their homes. They must spiritually and *physically* show solidarity with others who are persecuted.<sup>1</sup>

## Conclusion

Christians remain in a state where the presence of persecution is inevitable and thus the necessity to respond to it with endurance is a must. As we observe above, however, there are occasions when God may call his people to avoid persecution and instances where he may wish them to resist it as well. As Kuzmič concludes:

While there are times for anger and insistence that injustice and persecution must cease, there are also times for acceptance, perseverance, patient waiting, and prayer. Christian theology teaches the ability to discern the times and to live under pressure and with unresolved tension. A balance of outrage and acceptance is necessary: if one prevails, the dialectical tension is lost. Those in positions of power have greater responsibility to act against injustice than the victims themselves, who rarely have any public influence. However, embracing apathy or playing the role of a passive spectator is never a Christian option (Kuzmič 2004–2005:39).

In this light, Christians are faced with a choice: is God's directive in a given situation avoidance or endurance or is any measure of resistance called for? While this requires wisdom and discernment, the solidarity found in Christian community is never an option. As the body of Christ, Christians must ask, "How might we always be agonizing for you?" and in turn stand with, for, and alongside those who are persecuted.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on how to be involved in such efforts, go to the International Institute for Religious Freedom at [www.iirf.eu](http://www.iirf.eu) or the World Evangelical Alliance's Religious Liberty Commission at [www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc](http://www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc).



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## Interview with Elizabeth Ton

This is a personal testimony of someone who has experienced significant suffering for the sake of her love for Christ. She is the wife of theologian Josef Ton, a renowned Romanian Christian leader and theological educator. The editors met her on the occasion of the Bad Urach Consultation on “Developing an evangelical theology of suffering, persecution and martyrdom,” held on 16-18 September 2009 in Germany. They were impressed by her deep spirituality and felt it would not be adequately captured by the consultation statement. Mirjam Scarborough conducted and edited the interview.

**Q** Where and when were you born?

**ET** I was born in Romania in the town of Aiud in 1933 into a Christian family, where I learned what it means to be a Christian.

**Q** Was it usual in your environment to be born into a Christian family?

**ET** No, my father was a pioneer in his time. He came to know the Lord by himself, by asking the question, ‘if there are laws made by man, where are the laws made by God for man?’ One day somebody gave him a Bible and there he found the answer. He found Jesus. He became an evangelist and also a pastor. He was under some form of persecution almost all the time, because at that time the Orthodox Church persecuted the non-Orthodox believers. They locked our churches even before the communists did. When the communists took over they opened the churches and it was as if freedom had arrived, but that was only for a while, because after a very short time, they started their own persecution and slowly the persecution got worse. The communists gave us the freedom to gather, to have our churches, but at the same time they limited our activities very much, and that was the hardest thing. But, we rejoiced being together, as long as they let us be in a church. And there were somehow meetings we could hold without being discovered.

**Q** You faced a lot of opposition from early childhood. How did your faith continue to develop under these adverse circumstances?

**ET** For one it helped growing up in a family where the parents were strong Christians. My father was a fighter, a defender of the faith. He was beaten and he experienced a lot of problems, because he was so strong in his faith. I learned from that. Because God was present in our family, we didn’t feel the hardness of the situation.

We just rejoiced in the Lord and we knew that we were different and we were persecuted, because Jesus was persecuted.

(A further important milestone in my early faith development) was my baptism when I was 14 years old. I remember that on that day heaven was open. (Reflecting on the presence I felt), one day in my devotion I read that God assisted Jesus at his baptism and said, 'You are my beloved Son in which I find all my pleasure.' I said, 'I know God is my father too. I am his child too, I am his daughter.' I believe strongly what I felt was His presence. He comes alongside us as we follow him through the (baptismal) water, which represents our death and our resurrection.

(School was one place where I experienced this presence of Jesus.) Although I always felt rejected at school, I was never upset. I simply accepted it. I didn't miss the friendship of my fellow pupils, because I was a Christian. If you are rejected that means that you don't belong to the world, and I was not ashamed of that. My father always said, 'Dare to be different!'

**Q** How did you eventually meet a husband who shared your faith?

**ET** He was my neighbour, we knew each other from childhood. God prepared us, both of us, I am convinced that he is the one whom God had chosen for me.

**Q** How did you see your role as a wife?

**ET** My husband was involved in lots of tasks, and wearing many hats. What did I do for him? In short, I made him happy. To make him happy meant to be behind him in everything. That means you have to know everything that he is doing. He shared absolutely everything with me especially when we faced serious problems.

**Q** What were some of the problems you faced together, and how did you deal with them?

**ET** First of all he wrote a paper fighting for the rights of the church. During that time he tried to teach me that as a result I would maybe have to give him up and give him to the Lord, because he might be killed. I told him, 'I don't feel it's time for that.' (After his first paper) one of our pastor friends actually collected 50 [supporting] signatures and humanly speaking this saved his life. We knew this was a victory. But after the second paper, the Christian Manifesto, we faced a lot of hardship. But by that time we had already walked a long way with the Lord in difficult

situations, and we were ready. As a result of the paper they searched our house and put us under house arrest, and they were interrogating us a lot. They were always threatening us with hard prison. They even threatened to kill us. This time round I really felt that they would do it. I learned one important lesson from this experience: In order to stand firm during that time I had to understand, what it is to love God and to love Jesus. It was a choice, to be with Jesus or to depart from Jesus. But when you know Jesus the beauty of his love, his goodness, his mercy, his forgiveness, how can you not stay with him? He had also shown us how much he's with us. I knew he will be there with us even unto death and suffer with us.

Another special lesson I learnt during that time is that you have to be totally free to have perfect communication with God. Don't do anything of which you are not sure that it is right. For example, we had to make sure my husband's papers would get out of the country. One day I was staying with some friends in Bucharest, when an English diplomat came to visit. My host said, 'Elizabeth, you have to sign this paper away, because we won't have another chance to give it to a diplomat,' and so I signed it away. However, I wasn't sure that I had done the right thing. After I arrived back home, I took the Bible, opened it and the word was, 'because you weren't afraid, my gift for you is your life.' You cannot mistake it when God is talking to you, because when he talks he gives you the message you need. And that message works in you what you need. He gives you something which you did not have before, and removes any doubt and fear.

I also realized one has to be very careful in everything one says during interrogations, and not have any doubts afterwards. You have to trust the Holy Spirit. He enlightens your mind. It is almost as if you read what you have to say.

Once, however, I was much afraid, because the authorities had said, 'we will come on Monday (that was on a Friday), on Monday we will see what we choose to do to you.' I somehow was not prepared this time round. I asked my husband to tell me why we had to die. What he said stayed in my mind: 'As my father sent me so I send you.' In such a situation, you read that verse in a totally different way. You feel how Jesus was sent to be crucified and you see the *via dolorosa*, but you feel God in you.

So I just prayed, ‘Lord, I want to honour your name, give me the power to stand and not bring shame on you.’ And during that prayer I felt my backbone strengthen and keep me upright.

One afternoon I prayed near our little baby's bed and I said, ‘Lord: to whom can I entrust my daughter?’ Then I heard a voice saying, ‘Who can take care for her better than me?’ When I heard that I said, ‘Oh please, be the father and the mother of my child.’ And I really felt that I was detached physically, emotionally from her in every way. Now I think that was a gift which was given in that time for my daughter, because God really cared for her. Afterwards I went into the kitchen. It was three o’clock in the afternoon, and I looked through the window, and I saw something like a white cloud coming very close, and I said to my husband, ‘If I take one step, I feel I will step right into eternity. It's so close, its right here.’

- Q** It seems that although you had to give up a lot because of your faith you have also gained much?
- ET** When you receive Jesus and give up other things, you get everything with him. I have to be free in my heart, and love. I began to realize what it means to love Jesus more than anything. It is one of Jesus’ commands to love him more than anybody and anything, so that he comes first in my life. I realized the love for him helps me in times of persecution. It gives me power to stand. That love keeps me inside of him, and he stands up with me, in me and me in him. And that’s the whole power which gives me the joy, the freedom, the peace, the rest – it’s wonderful. His love is everything, it was his love that put him on the cross. I started from the point that everything he asks me to do is good for me. I gained from that. For me, his love is a strength.
- Q** If you had to give one piece of advice to a young woman who is facing persecution, what would you say to her?
- ET** If she is ready to die, she will go and face persecution. If she is not ready to die for Jesus, she doesn’t have to go and face it. You cannot stand the fear, it would kill you. But if you gave your life to Jesus you will gain it, you will gain what you never ever dreamed of: joy, beauty, fullness, everything. You see the world through his eyes. You think through his mind, you love through his love. You do everything through him. It’s so much more precious than my life. For me his will is my life, is my home, it is

my rest. If God wants her to do a ministry in a hostile environment, she will be protected. Those three young men in the Book of Daniel were brought out of the furnace without any harm. Daniel was brought out. And what was the gain? God was glorified. And all those pagan people recognize there is no other God. What you can do: through your life or through your death you can honour God. And if God is choosing you to die for him, he will help you to die in such a way that they will see God in you. That's for sure.

**Q** After the antagonism and persecution you faced, what has changed in your life?

**ET** Well what I am trying to live for now: to teach my sisters, and to tell them that it's worth to live a real Christian life. If you love God, then you show your love for God through living your life for those around you. The love of God is something which opens your eyes for the needs around you. And it's so wonderful in the evening when you go to sleep and you can see that yesterday was a day when God blessed me.

Thank you very much for sharing your experiences with our readers.

## Bad Urach Consultation 2009

### Editorial comment

In place of the planned event report by Dr Mirjam Scarborough, we reproduce the post consultation press release.

### International theological declaration on persecution of Christians in the process of being drafted

Württemberg Evangelical Lutheran Synod in Germany welcomes consultative process of the World Evangelical Alliance

The director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom (Bonn, Cape Town, Colombo) of the World Evangelical Alliance, Prof. Dr. Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher, announced that an international theological declaration on persecution of Christians is in the process of being drafted.

It's aim is to develop an evangelical theology of suffering, persecution and martyrdom for the global church in mission.

The declaration emanates from an international consultative process, coordinated by the co-director of the institute, Dr. Christof Sauer (Cape Town, South Africa) on behalf of the Religious Liberty Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance.

The climax so far has been a consultation which took place on September 16-18, 2009, in Bad Urach, Germany. About 24 theologians from 5 continents participated.

According to Dr. Richard Howell, co-convenor of the consultation and General Secretary of the Asian Evangelical Alliance, this is the first international exchange of this kind, as the topic has so far been discussed only rarely on a national or continental level.

The president of the Synod of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Württemberg, Dr. Christel Hausding presented greetings to the consultation participants on behalf of Bishop Dr. Frank July. Hausding said: "I thank you very much, that you are providing the important theological ground work on this issue." People growing up in the West of Germany are surprised to learn, that even there, Christians can suffer public defamation, as has recently happened.

The convenor of the consultation, Dr. Sauer gave some indication of the outline of the declaration: “As Christians we want to live in peace with everybody. We are actually not seeking suffering, but when our witness for Christ is leading to persecution, we are ready to suffer for Christ. At the same time we are publicly speaking up against persecution of Christians and adherents of other religions and we are opposing injustice and systems of oppression on the basis of human rights.”

The chairman of the International Institute for Religious Freedom, Rev Dr. Paul Murdoch emphasized the enabling role of the institute: “The IIRF is establishing a network of academic research on a global level. This study process has exciting potential to serve the global church in mission”. This consultative process has led to a uniquely broad cooperation between the WEA Commissions for religious liberty, theology and mission as well as the Theological Working Group of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. The project aims to feed in to the Third Lausanne Congress for World Evangelization to be held in Cape Town in 2010.

The declaration and a publication of the consultation papers are expected early in 2010.



## Uniting in advocacy: Reflections on the Schwäbisch-Gmünd Congress 2009

Michael Hausin\* and Christof Sauer\*\*

### Abstract

Ten human rights organisations and Christian mission agencies met in Schwäbisch-Gmünd/Germany for a congress "Remember the martyrs - persecution of Christians today". For Germany this was unprecedented and it has succeeded in uniting mainly evangelical Christians in advocacy. The participants issued a call, addressed to the German government, to maintain and strengthen religious freedom in foreign policy. The call is predominantly positive and affirmative rather than demanding. The congress indicates that German evangelicals are starting to take an increasing number of political concerns seriously. Political initiatives developed in American evangelicalism are being contextually emulated in Germany.

**Keywords** congress, advocacy, declaration, policy making, evangelicals.

Ten human rights organisations and Christian mission agencies met in Schwäbisch-Gmünd/Germany for a congress "Remember the martyrs – persecution of Christians today" on 22-25 November 2009.<sup>1</sup> It was

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\* Michael Hausin (\*1965) attended the Congress in Schwäbisch Gmünd and wrote the first draft of the article, which was then expanded in cooperation with the co-author. Whenever the first person is used, it reflects Hausin's opinion. Hausin is the editor of the journal of Hilfsaktion Märtyrerkirche (HMK, Voice of the Martyrs) in Uhldingen, Germany since 2002. He has studied political science, history, and sociology in Freiburg and Rostock, Germany and completed his doctorate in politics at Rostock University in 1999. Previously he has worked as a lecturer in adult education among others at the Institute for Psychology and Pastoral Care. He has published articles for Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen, Idea-Spektrum and other publications. He is a member of the Commission for the Research of Totalitarianism and Democracy and a Member Religious Liberty Commission of the German Evangelical Alliance (AKREF). E-mail: michael.hausin@h-m-k.org.

\*\* Christof Sauer (\*1963) who had the original idea for the article, but was unable to attend the congress, revised the article and provided material to place the congress in an international perspective. He is Co-Director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom of the World Evangelical Alliance (www.iirf.eu). E-mail: christof@iirf.eu.

<sup>1</sup> The organisations: Hilfsaktion Märtyrerkirche (HMK), Open Doors (OD), Licht

organised by the Christian Conference Centre Schönblick and the news agency of the German Evangelical Alliance (*idea*). The impulse for the congress had initially been given by Dr Rolf Sauerzapf and Pastor Manfred Müller, the chair and the leader of Hilfsaktion Märtyrerkirche (HMK, German branch of Voice of the Martyrs).

More than 200 people from different denominational backgrounds from all over Germany gathered to reflect on the persecuted church around the world. The organisers were able to recruit a good number of highly qualified speakers, like Prof Thomas Schirmmayer, Director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom, Rev Dr Richard Howell, General Secretary of the Asian Evangelical Alliance and the Evangelical Fellowship of India, Tony Lambert, a former British diplomat in Beijing, and Günter Nooke, Commissioner for Human Rights of the German Government.<sup>2</sup> Patron of the congress was the Bishop of the Protestant Church in Württemberg, Dr. Frank July. In his short written word of welcome he criticised the media for their indifference to religious persecution which has led to ignorance on this matter as evidenced by their scandalous equating of Christian martyrs to suicide bombers. But politicians took note of the congress as evidenced by the two-page letter of greeting by Volker Kauder, the chairperson of the parliamentary group of the ruling conservative party CDU/CSU. Among other things he wrote: "It is a call to action especially for us as Christians when we hear how Christian brothers and sisters are suffering. We are one with them in Christ." Unfortunately the inclusion of catholic organisations in the planning of the congress had not been considered timely enough to make it feasible. While a number of catholic Christians active in advocacy for persecuted Christians in different organisations and in their own churches were among the participants, no roman-catholic organisations were among those officially represented. Kuno Kallnbach, one of the congress

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im Osten (LiO), Evangelische Karmelmission, Religious Liberty Commission of the German Evangelical Alliance (AKREF), Christian Media Association (kep), Christian Solidarity International (CSI), Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF), International Society for Human Rights (IGFM), International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF).

<sup>2</sup> Audio recordings of the presentations are available for order from Haus Schönblick: Tel. +49-7171-97070, E-mail: kontakt@schoenblick-info.de.

organisers, suggested that more efforts should be made to encourage the attendance of catholic groups in the future.

## **1. More freedom of choice - more persecution**

In his opening keynote address Prof Thomas Schirrmacher reported on the current status of the struggle for religious freedom around the world. According to his observation, the efforts to defend religious freedom are more successful than in former years, because politicians and the worldwide community are now viewing religious freedom as an important issue. Schirrmacher maintains: “The quest for religious freedom is separate from the question of truth or the true religion. We do not defend the right of others to have their own religion because we think they are right in it, but because we respect the right of human beings to choose the fundamental orientation of their own lives.”

Globalisation has indeed increased the importance of the issue of religious liberty. Schirrmacher's claims are supported by what Peter Berger, sociologist of religion, stated for the Western world as early as the 1980s. And this is true today even on a global level. More and more people have access to information about other religions. Almost everybody is able to know that his or her inherited religion or tradition is not unique. There is a choice – a moment of freedom. More people will change their religious beliefs – and as an accompanying phenomenon there will be more efforts to hinder that.

Günter Nooke, Commissioner for Human Rights, emphasised at the congress that according to all international conventions religion is not a private matter. There exists a right to practise one's religion in public. “It may be unwise and inadequate to speak about your Christian faith in public in Islamic countries, e. g. in Yemen. But this still does not put in the wrong those who claim this elementary human right for themselves.” Mr Nooke had been part of a church-based opposition group in former East Germany and experienced discrimination there. He laments the lack of understanding in the West concerning religion. “Hardly anyone seems to deem important enough the defence of the right to freedom of belief in its full extent and to be willing to risk major conflicts for it.”

Field reports and podium discussions gave an impression of the current situation of persecuted Christians. The audience heard eye

witness reports from India, Nigeria, Indonesia, China, Sudan, Pakistan and Iraq. The reports showed the whole variety of dangers which Christians are facing, from defamation to discrimination, culminating in brutal persecution.

The representatives of the different countries explained what life looks like for Christians in their respective contexts, but they did not focus on the problems only. In some countries there seems to be a huge interest in the Christian faith – in spite of or maybe because of persecution. Projects to aid affected Christians were presented. At an open discussion about the situation in China, different perspectives of the current situation became obvious. While Tony Lambert from OMF and Konrad Brandt (Marburg Mission/ China Partners) underlined the positive development in religious policy during the past twenty years, the CEO of Open Doors Germany, Markus Rode, emphasised how various unregistered churches in particular still have to live with reprisals.

## **2. A resolution focusing on government policy**

The congress issued a call for religious freedom which mainly addresses the German government. It will be forwarded via the Commissioner of the Council of Protestant Churches in Germany to the federal government and also sent to all members of parliament, to government ministries and various church bodies like the World Council of Churches. The participants of the congress unanimously agreed that “the protection of religious freedom is essential for living together in human dignity and peaceful co-existence of nations.”

The call is predominantly positive and affirmative rather than demanding. In five affirmations the participants of the congress express their appreciation to the Federal Government for having made religious freedom an important issue in recent years. A resolution of the parliament in 2007 ‘on solidarity with persecuted Christians and other persecuted minorities’ is praised as “the only document of its kind worldwide.” The endorsement of the issue in the coalition agreement of the new government is equally lauded, as it promises to lobby continually for religious freedom internationally and to pay particular attention to the situation of Christian minorities. The affirmations are combined with the expectation that good practice is maintained and efforts are increased.

Furthermore, the congress “positions” itself broadly and in a non-sectarian manner by emphasising its solidarity with all persecuted Christians and respect for the different cultures that have developed from various religions. The importance of “unrestricted liberty to change one’s religious adherence” is particularly emphasised, not only as a position but also in the closing appeals.

The appeals to government are focusing on three specific issues: The call on the government to increase their efforts to improve the human rights situation internationally and to defend the right of conversion to Christianity or any other religion without jeopardy. Secondly, the Human Rights Report of the government should include documentation on the right to conversion and the violations thereof. Finally it is advised to split the Human rights report in order to give religious freedom more space in a separate report, following the example of the United States.

The call was drawn up in consultation with sympathetic politicians, with consideration of how best to assist them. Great effort was taken to focus on realistic and relevant issues. Religious freedom experts and Christian media representatives had been consulted as well as all the organisations involved. How was it received? Human Rights Commissioner Nooke welcomed the call at the ensuing press conference and expressed his hope that it would strengthen the work of the government. Dr Christof Sauer, Co-Director of the IIRF, expressly praised the Schwäbisch-Gmünd Call: “Such differentiated and specific suggestions are rarely made.” In my opinion the resolution has found the right balance between respectful address and challenge. It does not contain unrealistic demands nor self-righteous allegations. As it is non-partisan, the resolution has the potential to be read and used by representatives of different political parties. The advantage of an alliance of different organisations raising their united voice in a respectful, clear and comprehensible way is obvious. Rarely does a politician use a statement or publication of one of the Christian organisations as they are deemed unsuitable for the political arena or more often than not, not sufficiently professional. The collaboration issue was emphasised by CDU/CSU parliamentary chair Kauder: “I noticed with delight that your conference rests on the basis of an alliance of different organisations. I think this co-operation is very important in order for your concern to be heard and your task to be accomplished successfully.”

### 3. Contributions to advocacy

Examining the surge in the United States of America in advocacy for international religious freedom in the 1990s, the political scientist Allen Hertzke claims: “The new faith-based movement is filling a void in human rights advocacy, raising issues previously slighted – or insufficiently pressed – by secular groups, the prestige press, and the foreign-policy establishment” (Hertzke 2004:4). Let me examine to what degree that might apply to Germany, too. Assessing the situation in Germany at the opening of the congress, the chief editor of the protestant news agency *idea*, Helmut Matthies, maintained that there could be no better point in time to fight for religious freedom, firstly, because Germany has been a truly free country for twenty years now, due to its reunification and secondly, there is more interest in the issue of religious liberty both among the public and the press than ever before.

#### 3.1 Advocacy in the German context

In what wider context of key Christian advocacy efforts for religious freedom was the congress positioned? Initially it was mainly a domain of the Evangelical Alliance. From its outset in the seventies, the news agency of the Evangelical Alliance has emphasised reporting on the persecution of Christians. During the last several years, in its widely circulated magazine *Idea Spektrum*, the Alliance has been regularly presenting a Christian ‘prisoner of the month’ together with a call for petitions.<sup>3</sup> Days of prayer for persecuted Christians, organised by different churches, are growing in importance. These days of prayer usually draw their information from material provided by the Evangelical Alliance for the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. In 2000, the German Evangelical Alliance has established its own national Religious Liberty Commission (AKREF) which since then has been compiling an extensive news bulletin and prayer requests every other week as well as an annual yearbook on the persecution of Christians today (AKREF 2009). This book which is published conjointly with *idea* and others, has become a sought-after source in many churches for preparing talks and meetings (Klingberg, Schirmacher, Kubsch 2009).

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<sup>3</sup> [www.idea.de](http://www.idea.de).

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg was the first mainline protestant church in Germany to introduce its own special day of prayer for persecuted Christians on 26 December of each year since 2007.<sup>4</sup> A few years earlier, the synod of this church started receiving annual reports about the situation of persecuted Christians around the world. The impetus thus provided has now reached national level with the Union of Protestant Churches in Germany (EKD), which represents the vast majority of protestant Christians in Germany. For the first time it has recommended its own ‘Day of Persecuted Christians’ to its member churches to take place on 28 February 2010.<sup>5</sup> Numerous outspoken public statements advocating religious freedom internationally have been made by the former Chair of the Council of Protestant Churches of Germany, Bishop Wolfgang Huber (2009), and by his recently elected successor, Bishop Margot Käßmann. Their statements indicate that persecuted Christians have become an important issue even on the highest level of church leadership. On the occasion of the presentation of the newly elected Council of the Synod of the EKD to representatives of society and politics in the national capital Berlin, Käßmann took the opportunity to speak about human rights, focusing on religious freedom nationally and internationally (Käßmann 2009). However, she did not refer to the Schwäbisch-Gmünd Congress, which had ended a week before, but to the 61<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the United Nations International Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December.

### 3.2 Goals of the congress

Returning to the contributions of the congress on advocacy, I have tried to ascertain, by interviewing its organisers, the goals of the congress. The stated goals were:

- to organise a meeting of as many German organisations as possible that are already involved in working for the persecuted church in order to facilitate mutual exchange
- to supply the participants with comprehensive information about persecuted Christians

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<sup>4</sup> This is St. Stephen’s Day for which the Roman-Catholic conference of Bishops in Germany had issued prayer information annually for a number of years.

<sup>5</sup> Before, it appears that beside individual appeals for prayer for major crisis situations, the EKD had only published a prayer or information brochure on “suffering of Christians in the world” (1977 and 1988) or “religious freedom under threat” (EKD 2003) every decade or so.

- to create a platform for the networking of participants and organisers in order for them to work more effectively for the persecuted church in the future
- to raise awareness in the churches of the issue of the persecution of Christians
- to send a message to policy makers in order for them to respond, consider the importance of the issue and offer adequate help.

While some of the outcomes have already been discussed earlier in this article, I will now focus mainly on the achievement of cooperation among Christians and the effects on the media.

### **3.3 Achieving co-operation**

In my view it is a very positive sign that evangelicals, mainstream protestants and (secular) political representatives were willing and able to work together for the issue of religious freedom. Whatever their theological or ideological backgrounds might be, they all had a similar understanding of religious freedom as a right of every individual. I concur with Allen Hertzke (2004:29): “That is why religious mobilization is potentially so momentous; it produces a new human rights constituency acknowledged and even celebrated by secular activists.” As mentioned earlier, there were no catholic organizations present, but neither were any representatives of the protestant free churches to be found. When Thomas Schirmacher was asked to express his opinion on the potential impact of the congress, he suggested that the congress might exert a greater influence on politicians, like members of the German parliament, than on the churches.

“The cooperation of different organisations in a broad coalition, that places its common concern in the foreground and not the self-portrayal of any single organization,” is what Paul Murdoch, chair of AKREF, deems to be the most important signal of the congress. “It is important to raise awareness of persecution among all Christians.” He hopes that the participants will work towards this goal in their own individual groups, e.g. in prayer meetings in their home churches. He is confident that this topic will be an issue in politics. He was encouraged by earlier discussions he held with politicians, some of which took place even at the German Chancellor's office, and he would recommend to Evangelical Alliances in other countries to hold such congresses as well.



The congress 'Persecution of Christians today' with such a broad platform of organisers has been a unique event in Germany. Both Murdoch and Schirmmacher agree that they cannot remember a congress with such a broad orientation. In the 1970s the journalist Heinz Matthias organised a number of congresses in Germany on the situation of the Christians in the East. The intention of those congresses focused on helping Christians behind the iron curtain, not globally, and there was no broad coalition of agencies (Reimer 1979:335-336).

Schirmmacher stated after the congress: We have different traditions, a different history, different theological dispositions and also different approaches in our work for persecuted Christians. But in our public appearance we need to endeavour to speak with one voice. We are much better perceived by politicians and churches if we act in conjunction rather than as individual agencies. Equally, the reservations against individual agencies diminish when they are part of a large alliance of initiatives."

### **3.4 Between media respect and silence**

What effects did the congress have on the media? The press was represented by only two local newspapers (Rems-Zeitung, Gmünder Tagespost), a countrywide conservative weekly newspaper (Junge Freiheit), the news agency of the Evangelical Alliance and the Protestant Press Service EPD. The local television broadcast SWR reported in a 30 second feature, while Christian television news by *idea* gave it 3 minutes of airtime. Christian television ERF videotaped the presentations in view of future broadcasts on its own programmes and by Bible TV. All press reports about the congress and its concerns were positive. The congress, mainly organised by evangelicals, was well received by those who did report, which was partly due to the presence of Human Rights Commissioner Günter Nooke, a former dissident of East Germany, and the mayor's personal welcome address to the participants.

It needs to be noted that a congress trying to provide the best available information on the persecution of Christians was not picked up by the opinion-makers among the media. However, shortly afterwards a rash statement by a foreign politician against Europe and Christians led to widespread reporting about the situation of Christians in his country and other difficult situations. As a surprising response to the reaction of Turkey's prime minister Erdogan to the ban by popular vote on the building of new minarets in Switzerland, in which he

called Europe and Christians fascists, dozens of articles have appeared on the situation of Christians in Turkey and other countries. The most popular BILD-newspaper featured Thomas Schirrmacher as an expert on religious freedom in Islamic countries (2 December)<sup>6</sup> and RTL Television came to interview him. While the mainstream media no longer ignore the persecution of Christians, it is still under-reported (cf. Hertzke 2009). It seems to feature mainly in connection with highly emotive issues or crises concerning Germans rather than in regular coverage on religious persecution itself.

### 3.5 A novelty in German-speaking Europe

Finally, I would like to ask how unique this congress was in the international perspective. Almost 14 years earlier, in the United States, Freedom House had hosted a conference of 100 key US Christian leaders and activists on ‘the global persecution of Christians’ on 23 January 1996 in Washington DC. At this conference the National Association of Evangelicals released an unprecedented and forceful ‘Statement of Conscience’ and call to action, addressed to the government. This was then endorsed or commended by some major denominations (Shea 1996). This resulted on the one hand in the annual International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church which commenced in December 1996. On the other hand it eventually gave more prominence to religious freedom in U.S. foreign policy by instituting annual Religious Freedom Reports by the State Department, the appointment of an Ambassador for Religious Freedom and a U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, among other measures (Shea 2008, Hertzke 2004).

In the United Kingdom, a ‘Christian Forum in Support of Persecuted Religious Minorities Worldwide’ was launched at a London conference on 20 July 2002, which attracted nearly 200 participants.<sup>7</sup> Backing for the group has come from a range of mission agencies and human rights groups. The mandate of the forum is to facilitate the sharing of information, raise awareness within church and society, respond appropriately and encourage prayer and action. Bishop Mano Rumalshah of the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel was the original visionary for the Forum. After 2003 no trace of activities of the forum can be found on the internet.

<sup>6</sup> <http://tinyurl.com/BILD-TS>.

<sup>7</sup> <http://tinyurl.com/UK-Forum>.

On an international level, the ‘Religious Liberty Partnership’ emerged as a Christian umbrella body in 2007 for the purpose of encouraging and nurturing partnership and collaboration among international Christian organisations focused on religious liberty. More specifically they endeavour to work together in addressing advocacy and in raising global awareness of religious persecution (RLP 2009:7).

From an international perspective the Schwäbisch Gmünd congress was not unique as there are similar initiatives in other nations. However, for Germany it was a novelty. Similar initiatives have had an impact on the foreign policy of the United States, and forums of agencies were formed in the UK and internationally.

Closer to home, some activities can be registered in Switzerland, which are remotely comparable. The reformed churches of some German speaking cantons in Switzerland together with Mission 21 (former Basel Mission) have launched a two year campaign on ‘Religion and Freedom and Dignity.’<sup>8</sup> This has resulted in a conference for church members on ‘What to do when people are discriminated against for their faith’ on 24 October 2009 in Lenzburg, Aargau<sup>9</sup>. An ‘historical and theological day of study’ in Basel on ‘Religious minorities under pressure - insights from mission theology’ in Basel on 29 May 2010 is also being prepared. The project aims at sensitising churches to the issue and at funding development projects and dialogue activities as possible remedies for religious conflict caused by social injustice. This is not a nationwide campaign including more than one agency but the initiative of the Aargau Reformed Synod which has commendably looked for and found some partners for synergy. However, the Reformed Synod in the Canton of Zürich is pursuing its own project.

#### **4. German evangelicals taking political concerns seriously**

The Schwäbisch Gmünd Congress on religious persecution and liberty shows that political initiatives developed in American Evangelicalism are being contextualised in Germany. This is remarkable in view of the

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<sup>8</sup> <http://tinyurl.com/m21-freiheit>; home: [www.mission-21.org](http://www.mission-21.org).

<sup>9</sup> <http://tinyurl.com/Ref-AG-CH>; home: [www.ref-ag.ch](http://www.ref-ag.ch).

particular difficulties German evangelicals have with their pietist tradition of being the 'quiet ones in the land' who are concerned with salvation while at the same time ignoring social and political concerns (cf. Hausin 1999). However, this attitude has been true of only some of the evangelicals both past and present. Often a mark of evangelical piety is the wavering between being open towards the world and turning away from the world, the manoeuvring between the church and the world, and even between changing the world and avoiding it altogether. As long as certain principles of humanitarianism, justice and freedom are maintained, they stay silent. Wherever those principles are abused, evangelicals are suddenly able to criticise radically. This is especially true in cases where governments do not allow religious liberty.

Evangelical spirituality does not automatically signify political engagement or disengagement. Both approaches are options that are used, depending on the circumstances. The ways in which German evangelicals are active are changing. The reality that one has to join forces in order to reach certain political goals caused them to seek a consensus among themselves. This is the only way they can make themselves heard. Complaints alone will not move political authorities. German evangelicals have suffered this reality in the 1970s and 1980s. Since the end of the 1980s a number of explicitly political organisations were founded by evangelicals.<sup>10</sup> This shows the growing awareness that in a pluralistic democracy things can be achieved only by means of powerful tools. At the same time we can sense a change of awareness among evangelicals who are usually in danger of acquiescing to the political status quo, as long as it does not interfere with their private practice of religion. Their political and societal initiatives in instances where foundational structures or numerous individuals are affected, show that they consider society to be malleable. Since the end of the 80s, appeals and demonstrations against certain political developments have been organised by evangelicals. As Hertzke (2004:29) says: "Movements need foot soldiers armed with information and a willingness to contact their

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<sup>10</sup> Aktion 'Die Wende' in 1983 to support a moral regeneration, Christliches Forum in 1987 against the de-christianisation of Germany, Aktion Christliche Gesellschaft for calvinist inspired politics in Germany, AKREF in 2000 for religious liberty, Commission on politics of the German Evangelical Alliance in 2003, Micha initiative of the German Evangelical Alliance.

elected representatives, donate money, and enlist others in the cause.” Therefore idea chief editor Helmut Matthies hopes the congress will activate churches in prayer and protest.

After having dealt only with ‘easy topics’ like abortion or family politics for a long period, with the topic of religious liberty evangelicals are now opening up for themselves a whole field that actually corresponds with their tradition. Shortly after the founding of the Evangelical Alliance, its representatives travelled to the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire in order to achieve religious liberty for the Christians there. It should be noted that they did not do this for the almost non-existent protestants, but for the orthodox Christians. In Germany, the Alliance fought for the rights of the free churches that in some respect had lesser rights and societal standing than the members of the protestant state churches (Voigt 2004:37-74). Lobbying for religious liberty is not a strange thing for evangelicals to do. And it comes as no surprise that in 1663 a ‘proto-evangelical’ like Roger Williams, the founder of the Federal State of Rhode Island, for the first time advanced a constitution that ensured “full liberty in religious concerns” (Gaustadt 1974:66). “Our kind of mission presupposes that others are able to represent their religious convictions as well” explains Thomas Schirrmacher.

Through their international connections, evangelicals are in direct contact with persecuted Christians. By their initiative to help their brothers and sisters, their eyes were opened anew to the meaning of religious liberty. It is remarkable that their dedication for the persecuted does not stop with their own brand of religious adherence. Evangelicals today are among the strongest advocates of religious liberty ever. Their view of mankind as created by God and as responsible people presupposes that each individual adopts a faith in his or her heart – even if it is a wrong one. With their efforts for a general liberty of religion evangelicals opt out of a simple political right or left classification.

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## Schwäbisch Gmünd Call for Religious Freedom

Drafted within the context of the congress “Remember the Martyrs - Persecution of Christians Today” which took place at Schwäbisch Gmünd in Germany from 22-25 November 2009 with more than 200 individuals and 11 organisations from Germany and beyond in attendance.

### Introduction

We wish to make our voice heard.

The signatories of this document – private individuals and representatives of organisations – are well acquainted with current issues concerning human rights and religious freedom.

This is the first large-scale meeting of its kind attended by the undersigned, commissioned by their respective German-based and internationally active organisations and Christian agencies. The special weight and importance of this appeal therefore lies in the newly found unanimity among such a variety of organisations, Christian agencies and individuals engaged in advocacy. More than any other forum, the participants in this congress have special insight into the human rights situation and in particular into religious freedom issues of individuals, as well as into the restriction of the activities of Christian churches internationally. In the course of the congress, various specific cases were reported by the organisations present and by some individuals affected.

The participants of the congress unanimously agree on the following: The protection of religious freedom is essential for living together in human dignity and peaceful co-existence of nations. Granting freedom of religion and conscience will contribute to the easing of tensions in the “clash of cultures”.

### Affirmations

1. We explicitly welcome the fact that the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, in its “Report of the Federal Government on its Human Rights Policy in the Context of Foreign Relations

and other Areas of National Policy” (Bericht der Bundesregierung über die Menschenrechtspolitik in den auswärtigen Beziehungen und in anderen Politikbereichen) expresses its essential appreciation of the themes of human rights and religious freedom.

2. We explicitly welcome the fact that the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany maintains the office of a “Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Aid” (Beauftragter der Bundesregierung für Menschenrechtspolitik und Humanitäre Hilfe) and we wish to express our hope that the tasks and authority of the Commissioner will be maintained and even expanded.
3. We have taken note of the resolution of the Bundestag (Lower House of the German Parliament) dated 31 January 2007 concerning ”Solidarity with persecuted Christians and other persecuted religious minorities”, which is the only document of this kind worldwide, and we do warmly welcome its content.
4. Furthermore we wish to explicitly express our appreciation of the fact that the Federal Government plays an active role in the Resolution on the “Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief”, which is being introduced by the European Union into the United Nations General Assembly and its Human Rights Council since 2004.
5. We have taken note and wish to express our appreciation of the fact that the Federal Government of Germany is involved in advocating elementary human rights in many places within the international context: minority rights, human rights for all in general and religious freedom for adherents of all religions, among others for Christians. We welcome the fact that this is specifically mentioned as a goal of government in the new coalition agreement of the 17<sup>th</sup> Legislature and we would appreciate continued and increased efforts on the part of the German government in this regard.

## **Positions**

6. We, the undersigned Christians, herewith publicly proclaim our solidarity with Christians of all countries, languages and cultures, particularly with Christians and Christian churches which are



experiencing various forms of religious intolerance or discrimination.

7. We respect the various cultures which have developed among the different religions and nations of the earth. We are convinced that religious freedom of individual citizens as well as the unrestricted liberty to change one's religious adherence, is an essential prerequisite for living together in human dignity and for the peaceful co-existence of nations and peoples.

## Appeals

8. We appeal to the Federal Government to further strengthen their efforts to protect human rights within the international context. In view of the fact that Christians are the most severely persecuted religious group globally, we appreciate if more of a focus is placed on human rights violations against Christians. Moreover, a change of religious adherence from other religions to Christianity as any other change of religious adherence should be possible without any danger anywhere in the world.
9. We appeal to the German Government, within the framework of its reports on the human rights situation, to additionally document and investigate in all countries the legal framework and the violations of the legal right to change religious adherence. We are firmly convinced: some specific issues requiring urgent action in order to protect elementary human rights will thus become evident. The organisations participating in this congress herewith declare their willingness to contribute information and documentation to the reports, if necessary.
10. We appeal to the Federal Government of Germany to investigate whether it would not be more conducive to split in two the "Report of the Federal Government on Human Rights Policy in the Context of Foreign Relations and other Areas of National Policy", as is being done in other countries (for example in the USA which annually publishes both an "International Religious Freedom Report" and "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices"). One report should deal with the question of human rights in general and a further report should deal with religious freedom. Both matters are so important and complex and are characterized by issues requiring different actions that it seems to

be expedient to investigate and document them in two separate reports.

Schwäbisch Gmünd, 23 November 2009

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Contact: [kuno.kallnbach@schoenblick-info.de](mailto:kuno.kallnbach@schoenblick-info.de)

Authorized translation by the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF)

## Orissa: A call to action and a call to prayer

### Religious Liberty Partnership \*

Two years after the first outbreak of mob violence against Christians in Kandhamal district, Orissa state, India, the Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP) remains deeply concerned for the situation. As a collaborative effort of Christian organizations focused on religious liberty, the RLP is urging its members to call upon Christians to unite in continued prayer for justice, reconciliation and peace in the area, and to encourage the Indian government to do all in its power to bring this about.

During the week of Christmas 2007, Christians belonging to Dalit and adivasi communities in Kandhamal were targeted in a wave of violence, which resulted in the widespread destruction of property. Then, in August 2008, when Swami Lakshmananda Saraswati and four of his followers were condemnably assassinated, allegedly by Maoist insurgents, the Christians were blamed, and became targets of ferocious reprisals. This resulted in the worst communal violence suffered by Christians in the history of post-independence India. At least 75 people have been confirmed as dead, and over 50,000 were forced to flee their homes. More than a year later, thousands of victims of violence are still suffering and waiting for justice.

The RLP welcomes the efforts made by the Indian government and Orissa state government to restore security and bring justice, reconciliation and peace. However, deep concerns remain about the continuing challenges. The government relief camps are now closed,

\* The International Institute for Religious Freedom is a member of the Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP) and endorses this call. The RLP is a collaborative effort of Christian organizations from around the world focused on religious liberty. The RLP seeks to more intentionally work together in addressing advocacy and in raising the awareness of religious persecution globally. Members of the RLP are primarily involved (that is the majority of their time, personnel, and resources) with ministry to persecuted Christians and/or in religious liberty issues in whatever context and strategy. For more information on the RLP, contact Brian O'Connell, RLP Facilitator at: [Brian@REACTServices.com](mailto:Brian@REACTServices.com); +1 425-218-4718.

yet a large proportion of victims have been unable to return to their villages for fear of death or forcible conversions to Hinduism. Many are living in grievous poverty in makeshift camps, often with no regular means of sustenance. Although compensation has been delivered to many victims, often it does not match their needs. Victims are continuing to receive threats from the perpetrators of violence, witnesses are facing intimidation by mobs outside courtrooms, and there is widespread fear of the danger posed by impunity. Hundreds of cases have not been registered properly by police, and therefore will not be subject to investigations or prosecutions. The future of the children of victims is also at risk. Many are fearful of attending school, and a large proportion of those sitting their tenth grade examinations have been failed, largely as a consequence of the severe disruption during the past year. “In general, India has a history of tolerance and inter-faith harmony, but religiously motivated violence has flourished in recent years,” said Dr. Joseph D’souza, President of the All India Christian Council and member of the RLP.

As the world’s largest democracy, my beloved country must enforce the strong laws on the books and protect the right for people of faith – or no faith at all – to freely worship as they choose. We pray that root causes are addressed like hate speech, lack of convictions for planners of attacks, and civil rights for Christians from the lowest castes.

Mervyn Thomas, Chairman of the RLP Leadership Team, and CEO of Christian Solidarity Worldwide in the UK said, “We urge that justice must be served in Kandhamal: it will be crucial for the restoration of peace and stability in the area. The wheels of justice are turning slowly, but the authorities need to tackle the significant challenges facing the judicial system. India is famous for her diversity and pluralism, and we look forward to the restoration of inter-communal harmony in this area.”

Additional members of the Religious Liberty Partnership’s Leadership Team include Floyd Brobbel of Voice of the Martyrs, Canada; Godfrey Yogarajah of the World Evangelical Alliance’s Religious Liberty Commission; Linus Pfister of HMK Switzerland, and Johan Companjen of Open Doors International.

The RLP also supports a call to prayer for the victims of violence, from Mgr. Raphael Cheenath, Catholic Archbishop of

Cuttack-Bhubaneswar in Orissa, who requests that churches around the world use the following prayer for Orissa on Christmas Day, 2009:

Gracious Father, Lord of all the earth, we praise you for the gift of Jesus Christ, sent into the world to break down the dividing walls of hostility. Have mercy upon those in Orissa who are suffering. Give them the peace and the justice that they crave, and cause the walls of bitterness and hatred in Orissa to be torn down. Comfort those who have been bereaved, counsel those who have been traumatised, provide for those who have lost everything. Give them the grace to forgive and confidence in your gracious favour. Do not let us forget them, our brothers and sisters in Christ, as we celebrate the coming of the Prince of Peace and look forward to his coming again in glory.

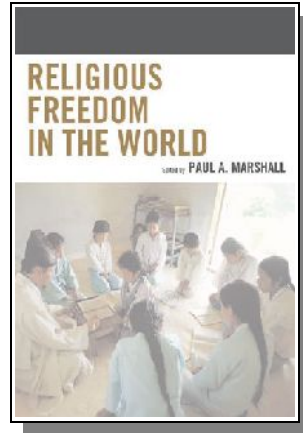
Members of the Religious Liberty Partnership (websites are listed for prayer resources and additional information, geographical names only indicate the main seat of an organisation):

- Advocates International, USA: [www.advocatesinternational.org](http://www.advocatesinternational.org)
- All India Christian Council, India: [www.indianchristians.in/news](http://www.indianchristians.in/news)
- China Aid, USA: [www.chinaaid.org](http://www.chinaaid.org)
- Christian Solidarity Worldwide, United Kingdom: [www.csw.org.uk](http://www.csw.org.uk)
- Danish European Mission, Denmark: [www.daneu.dk](http://www.daneu.dk)
- Friends of the Martyred Church, Finland: [www.martyredchurch.net](http://www.martyredchurch.net)
- HMK, Switzerland: [www.hmk-aem.ch](http://www.hmk-aem.ch)
- Hilfsaktion Märtyrerkirche, Germany: [www.h-m-k.org](http://www.h-m-k.org)
- International Christian Concern, USA: [www.persecution.org](http://www.persecution.org)
- International Institute for Religious Freedom, Germany, South Africa, Sri Lanka: [www.iirf.eu](http://www.iirf.eu)
- Jubilee Campaign, USA: [www.jubileecampaign.org](http://www.jubileecampaign.org)
- Norwegian Mission to the East, Norway: [www.nmio.no](http://www.nmio.no)
- Middle East Concern, Middle East: [www.meconcern.org](http://www.meconcern.org)
- Open Doors International, The Netherlands: [www.opendoorsuk.org](http://www.opendoorsuk.org)
- Release International, United Kingdom:  
[www.releaseinternational.org](http://www.releaseinternational.org)
- The Voice of the Martyrs, Canada: [www.persecution.net](http://www.persecution.net)
- World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission, GLOBAL: [www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rfc](http://www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rfc)

# Religious Freedom in the World

Paul A Marshall

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Religious Freedom in the World profiles 101 countries and territories, which between them contain more than 95 percent of the world's population, and uses a clearly comprehensible numeric scale to rank the level of religious freedom found in each. It also provides separately derived measures of government regulation of religion, government favoritism of religion, and social regulation of religion. The countries have been selected so that the survey represents each continent, major religion, and geographic area; covers countries with large populations; describes particularly egregious violators of religious freedom; and adequately illustrates variations within regions.

The survey is not a catalog of the rights of "religious people." The persecution of all people of any or no religion should be equally as offensive in our eyes as that of believers in any particular religion. Furthermore, since most people in the world profess to be believers of one kind or another, then such a survey would necessarily include most of the world's human rights violations of whatever kind. Rather, the focus is on the denial to anyone of rights of a particular kind, those connected with practicing one's religion, and the denial of rights for a particular reason, because of the religious beliefs of those who are persecuted and/or those who persecute.

Finally, in line with most human rights treaties, this survey covers freedom of "religion or belief." There are beliefs that, functionally, take the place of explicitly religious beliefs, and these, too, should be protected. Atheists and agnostics may also suffer loss of freedom of "religion or belief" and, in turn, may deny such freedom to others.

**Published in cooperation with the Center for Religious Freedom at the Hudson Institute.**

# Possible Dimensions of Religious Freedom

Paul A Marshall\*

## Abstract

The compiling of country profiles for the reference work *Religious Freedom in the World* required a clear concept of what they should contain and an instrument to retrieve this information equitably in vastly different situations. As this work is setting the benchmark in the field, IJRF considers it of interest to reproduce the criteria for country profiles as well as the checklist with questions for assessing the situation in a country.

**Keywords** religious freedom, criteria for country profiles, questionnaire, research.

## Criteria for country profiles

In the country profiles of *Religious Freedom in the World*<sup>1</sup>, we have sought to:

- Give a political overview of the country.
- Give a listing, with percentages, of the religious groupings within the country.
- Give a brief religious background of the country: what the major religious groups are now; what they have been historically; what changes are taking place; whether religion(s) tend to be tied to

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\* Paul A Marshall (\*1948) is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom. He serves on the Academic Board of the IIRF and has held several professorships in political science, law, philosophy and theology. He holds Masters degrees in Geochemistry and Philosophy, an M.A. and Ph.D. in Political Science (York University), with further studies in international human rights law (Strasbourg) and theology (Oxford). He is the author and editor of over twenty books on religion and politics, especially religious freedom and of several hundred articles. His writings have been translated into more than a dozen languages. E-mail: pmarshall@hudson.org.

<sup>1</sup> Paul A Marshall (ed) 2008. *Religious Freedom in the World*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield 2008:449-476. Appendix C: Criteria for profiles of religious freedom; Appendix D: Checklist of elements of religious freedom score. The American spelling is retained. Used with permission.

ethnicity, or to region, or to political parties; whether religious commitment is high or low, fanatic, lukewarm, or nominal.

- Mention any constitutional guarantees or restrictions on religious freedom, and other constitutional guarantees or restrictions relevant to religious freedom, and whether such guarantees are respected.
- Outline the legal framework that guarantees or restricts religious freedom, and other guarantees or restrictions relevant to religious freedom, and whether such guarantees are respected.
- If it is relevant, outline the legal framework at the provincial/state/regional level.
- Mention if religious freedom is restricted by law, outline the scope of the restrictions (e.g., what is forbidden or hampered), what the penalties for violations are, and to what degree the law is actually followed.
- Mention if the government restricts religious freedom by extralegal means; outline the scope of the restrictions and the penalties for violations.
- Mention any restrictions on religious freedom by "society," such as repression by family members, physical attacks, mob riots, or discrimination or exclusion in employment, housing, movement, and so forth. Here, we also note the degree to which the government tries and succeeds in curbing social restrictions on religious freedom.
- Mention any restrictions on religious freedom due to warfare or terrorism and the degree to which government tries and succeeds in curbing such restrictions on religious freedom.
- Mention any other factors not covered by the above.
- Mention noteworthy incidents that have occurred in the last two years and very noteworthy ones that have occurred in the last decade. This could include important trials, imprisonment, or massacres.
- Use these criteria and the checklist to assign the country a score on a religious freedom scale of one to seven, with one being good and seven being bad.



## Checklist of elements of religious freedom

To aid in this process, we have used a checklist that attempts partially to summarize the various possible dimensions of religious freedom and which broadly follows the criteria given in international human rights standards. Willy Fautre of Human Rights without Frontiers developed such a checklist, and the list given here is adapted and expanded from his work. Many parts of the checklist are repetitive because they approach the same material from different angles, such as individual freedom, self-government by religious bodies, economic dimensions, and discriminatory treatment between religious bodies. Some boxes may be empty for some countries.

The list can serve as a guide to many of the dimensions of religious freedom, to see how the violations can be grouped, and to check the intensity of the limits.

It should be emphasized that the scores [in the book] so derived are for countries and territories, not governments. We are interested in the practical situation, not per se in the culpability of any government. In a situation of terrorism or of civil war, the government may not be particularly blameworthy, but the religious freedom situation may be atrocious. The agents of religious repression might be terrorists or, perhaps most commonly, 'society,' as when religious groups are attacked by mobs or face pervasive discrimination.

The vertical categories refer to different elements of religious freedom. The horizontal categories refer to the presence or absence of freedom, the degree of the restriction of freedom, the nature of the restriction, the intensity of the restriction, the variability of the restriction, and the agent(s) of restriction. The checklist can also serve as a guide to whether you have covered most of the dimensions of religious freedom, to see how the violations can be grouped, and to check the intensity of the limits.

## Sample of questionnaire

Table D.1 Individuals' Right to Freedom of Conscience																	
Do citizens have the right ...	(a) Yes	(b) No	(c) Yes But	(d) No Exc ept	(e)	(f)	(g)	(h)	(i)	(j)	(k)	(l)	(m)	(n)	(o)	(p)	(q)
1.1 to have or not have a religion or belief of their choice?																	
1.2 ...																	

## Horizontal categories of the checklist<sup>2</sup>

The first four horizontal categories are: (a) yes, (b) no, (c) yes, but, (d) no, except.

The other boxes, (e)-(q) ask whether religious freedom:

- (e) is constitutionally guaranteed?
- (f) is legally guaranteed?
- (g) is given only to some groups not others (this is then taken up in the later boxes on discrimination)?
- (h) suffers de facto or de jure limitation by the central state or federal government.
- (l) suffers de facto or de jure limitation by regional government.
- (j) suffers de facto or de jure limitation by local government.
- (k) suffers de facto or de jure limitation by local government agents (such as police) acting unofficially.
- (l) Is there religious discrimination or practical limitation on religious freedom (access to employment or housing, familial violence ...) because of social pressure; which?
- (m) Does the government try to limit the effects described in (l)?

<sup>2</sup> Editors' note: Instead of reproducing the forms with a lot of blank space as they appear in the book, we have chosen to merely give the horizontal and the vertical dimensions of the checklist. This means the horizontal categories will have to be answered concerning each vertical category.

- (n) Does religious freedom suffer because of violence or threat from radical groups?
- (o) Does the government try to limit the effects described in (n)?
- (p) How severe are penalties applied to those who break government limits on religious freedom?
- (q) Assign a score to the overall degree of religious freedom in the country, due to all the above factors, on a scale of 1-7, with 1 being the most free, 7 being the least free.

## **Vertical categories of the checklist**

### **1. Individuals' Right to Freedom of Conscience**

*Do citizens have the right:*

- 1.1 to have or not have a religion or belief of their choice?
- 1.2 to adopt or to abandon a religion or belief?
- 1.3 to change religion or belief?
- 1.4 to be members of religious or non-religious communities of their choice?
- 1.5 to keep private their religious or non-religious affiliation (e.g. in the case of a census)?
- 1.6 to manifest, to defend, to promote and to disseminate their religious or non-religious beliefs in private?
- 1.7 to manifest, to defend, to promote and to disseminate their religious or non-religious beliefs in public?
- 1.8 to manifest, to defend, to promote and to disseminate their religious or non-religious beliefs in the media?
- 1.9 to take part in worship services, processions and pilgrimages, and to perform the rites associated with their religion or belief?
- 1.10 to choose not to take part in worship services and religious rites or customs which conflict with their personal beliefs?
- 1.11 to observe or not to observe days of rest in accordance with their religious beliefs and to celebrate festivals and ceremonies, whether secular or religious?

- 1.12 to make, seek out, acquire, import, export and possess literature, audio or video cassettes and other objects related to their religious or non-religious beliefs?

## **2. Freedom of Worship**

*Do communities of believers have the right:*

- 2.1 to have legal status?
- 2.2 to manifest their religious beliefs by holding private worship services?
- 2.3 to manifest their religious beliefs by holding public worship services?
- 2.4 to build, reopen, restore and maintain religious premises and places of worship where they can hold services?
- 2.5 to rent premises for religious worship?
- 2.6 to own their religious premises and places of worship?
- 2.7 to claim back religious premises and places of worship which have been unfairly confiscated from them?
- 2.8 to make full and free use of their chosen religious premises and places of worship in order to hold meetings and to carry out religious rites or customs?
- 2.9 to manufacture, acquire and use religious objects and artifacts according to their needs?
- 2.10 to own their religious objects and artifacts?
- 2.11 to hold services or meetings and to perform their rites or customs in a place other than their official premises (in open air, in cemeteries, private homes, hospitals, children's homes, prisons, army barracks...)?
- 2.12 to have free access to places sacred to their religion or belief?
- 2.13 to organize processions and pilgrimages?
- 2.14 to celebrate religious festivals in public or in private?
- 2.15 to celebrate baptisms, weddings and burials and so forth in accordance with their religious traditions?
- 2.16 to choose freely their religious personnel for their religious services and meetings?
- 2.17 Other?

### **3. Freedom of Clergy**

*Do ministers/ clergy/ religious leaders have the right:*

- 3.1 to perform the rites and customs established by their religious community using the holy books and liturgical texts of their choice and using the language, music and songs of their choice?
- 3.2 to preach in conformity with the doctrine of their religious community, without threat or interference from the state?
- 3.3 to have access to prisons, hospitals, the armed forces and other relevant bodies for chaplaincy work?
- 3.4 Other?

### **4. Right to Self-Government by Religious Bodies**

*Do communities of believers have the right:*

- 4.1 to implement their own institutional and hierarchical structures?
- 4.2 to train, appoint, elect or designate their future officers themselves, and to train them in their own institutes?
- 4.3 to appoint, to locate and to relocate their officers according to their needs?
- 4.4 to appoint, to elect and to designate their own leaders?
- 4.5 to set up communities and religious orders?
- 4.6 to own possessions and to use them as they choose?
- 4.7 to build, acquire, reopen and restore buildings and then to operate them independently?
- 4.8 to exchange, acquire, receive, import and use holy books and other religious publications?
- 4.9 to write, print and circulate, according to their needs, books and publications which deal with religious matters or which defend the freedom of conscience or religion?
- 4.10 to establish and maintain relationships with individuals and communities involved in religious affairs, without regard for national boundaries?
- 4.11 to solicit and receive voluntary financial and other contributions from individuals and institutions, either domestically or internationally.
- 4.12 Other?

## 5. Freedom of Religious Education and Instruction

- 5.1 Do families have the right to decide whether their children receive a religious education or not?
- 5.2 Do religious communities have the authority to ensure that religious instruction is given to the children entrusted to their care?
- 5.3 Do religious communities have the authority to run elementary schools, secondary schools, universities and other institutes of higher education?
- 5.4 Can religious instruction be given in teaching establishments which are not run by the religious community concerned?
- 5.5 Are the religious and moral beliefs of believers' children studying in state schools truly respected?
- 5.6 Are believers' children free not to participate in the activities of official organizations which have aims contrary to their religious and moral beliefs?
- 5.7. Are the various teaching establishments subject to the same set of rules, regardless of their religious or non-religious orientation?
- 5.8 Other?

## 6. Right to Social Participation

*Do religious groups have the right:*

- 6.1 to establish, manage, maintain and conduct charitable, humanitarian, medical, social and cultural institutions and associations?
- 6.2 to establish and practice printing houses, publishing houses and distribution networks?
- 6.3 to found and own newspapers, news agencies, radio and television stations and other media?
- 6.4 to have access to means of public communication (television, radio, Internet, newspapers, magazines)?
- 6.5 to found political parties?
- 6.6 Other?

## **7. Equality/Non-Discrimination of Individuals**

*Do believers of different religions, different groups within religions and atheists enjoy the same rights in the following areas?*

- 7.1 The choice of studies and access to university or other institutes of higher education.
- 7.2 Entry into a profession and free practice of work.
- 7.3 The enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights and advantages.
- 7.4 Accommodation in employment, schools and prisons to manifest their religious belief.
- 7.5 Before the courts.
- 7.6 Public life: Ability to hold public office.
- 7.7 Military service and conscientious objection.
- 7.8 Freedom of expression.
- 7.9 Freedom to seek information and to receive it from others.
- 7.10 Freedom of movement and of emigration.
- 7.11 Freedom of association and assembly.
- 7.12 Marriage or other social arrangements.
- 7.13 Other?

## **8. Equality/Non-Discrimination of Communities and Institutions**

*Do communities of believers, different groups within religions, atheistic groups and institutions enjoy the same rights in the following areas?*

- 8.1 Is there a state church or religion?
- 8.2 The establishment, management and maintenance of charitable, humanitarian, medical, social, cultural and religious institutions and associations.
- 8.3 The soliciting, receipt and handling of voluntary contributions, financial or other, from individuals and institutions.
- 8.4 The establishment and management of printing houses, publishing houses and distribution networks.

- 8.5 The founding and running of newspapers, press agencies, radio and television stations and other media.
- 8.6 Access to various public networks of social communication.
- 8.7 The public sector: legal status, representation on committees, in local administrations, etc.
- 8.8 The defense of their rights and denouncing of any attack on their freedom.
- 8.9 Chaplaincy arrangements.
- 8.10 Other?

## **9. Religious and Economic Freedom**

- 9.1 Are there any restrictions on religious affiliation in the economy?
- 9.2 Are there non-tariff barriers to trade based on religion?
- 9.3 Does religious discrimination affect the fiscal burden of government?
- 9.4 Are these regulatory burdens on economic activity and entrepreneurship based on religion?
- 9.5 Are there restrictions on banks and foreign exchange based on religion?
- 9.6 Are there any labor market restrictions based on religion?
- 9.7 Are there any religious restrictions on foreign investment?
- 9.8 Are there restrictions on property rights based on religion?
- 9.9 Are charitable donations allowed, including those to religious activities?
- 9.10 Are there restrictions on freedom of spiritual association in the workplace?
- 9.11 Are there rules governing employees and employers based on religion?
- 9.12 Are there restrictions on access to education based on religion?
- 9.13 Do communities of believers have the right to manufacture, acquire and use religious objects and artifacts according to their needs?
- 9.14 Do communities of believers have the right to own their religious objects and artifacts?



- 9.15 Do religious groups have the right to establish, manage, maintain and conduct charitable, humanitarian, medical, social and cultural institutions and associations?
- 9.16 Do religious groups have the right to establish and practice printing houses, publishing houses and distribution networks?
- 9.17 Do communities of religious believers have the right to appoint, to locate and to relocate their officers according to their needs?
- 9.18 Do communities of religious believers have the right to own possessions and to use them as they choose?
- 9.19 Do communities of religious believers have the right to exchange, acquire, receive, import and use holy books and other religious publications?
- 9.20 Do communities of religious believers have the right to establish and maintain relationships with individuals and communities involved in religious affairs, without regard for national boundaries?
- 9.21 Do communities of religious believers have the right to solicit and receive voluntary financial and other contributions from individuals and institutions, either domestically or internationally?
- 9.22 Do believers of different religions, different groups within religions, and atheists enjoy the same rights in the enjoyment of economic, social, and cultural rights and advantages?
- 9.23 Do believers of different religions, different groups within religions, and atheists enjoy the same rights in accommodation, employment, schools and prisons to manifest their religious belief?
- 9.24 Do believers of different religions, different groups within religions, and atheists enjoy the same rights where freedom of movement and of emigration is concerned?
- 9.25 Do communities of believers, different groups within religions, atheistic groups, and institutions enjoy the same rights in the establishment, management and maintenance of charitable, humanitarian, medical, social, cultural and religious institutions and associations?
- 9.26 Do communities of believers, different groups within religions, atheistic groups, and institutions enjoy the same rights in

soliciting, receipt and handling of voluntary contributions, financial or other, from individuals and institutions?

- 9.27 Do communities of believers, different groups within religions, atheistic groups, and institutions enjoy the same rights in the establishment and management of printing houses, publishing houses and distribution networks?
- 9.28 Do communities of believers, different groups within religions, atheistic groups, and institutions enjoy the same rights in the founding and running of newspapers, press agencies, radio and television stations and other media?
- 9.29 Do communities of believers, different groups within religions, atheistic groups, and institutions enjoy the same rights in access to various public networks of social communication?

## **10. Incitement against Religious Groups**

*Does the state:*

- 10.1 publish materials inciting religious discrimination or hatred?
- 10.2 supply funding for those publishing material inciting religious discrimination or hatred?
- 10.3 broadcast material inciting religious discrimination or hatred?
- 10.4 supply funds to those broadcasting religious discrimination or hatred?
- 10.5 fund preachers/teachers inciting religious discrimination or hatred?
- 10.6 fund places of worship inciting religious discrimination or hatred?
- 10.7 fund schools inciting religious discrimination or hatred?

## Noteworthy

While the focus of this feature is on the latest substantial reports and research pertaining to religious freedom we also endeavour to introduce sources not covered in earlier editions. The noteworthy items are structured in three groups: Annual reports and global surveys, regional and country reports (sorted alphabetically), and specific issues. They are preceded by an item of current concern. Though we apply serious criteria in the selection of items noted, it is beyond our capacity to scrutinise the accuracy of every statement made. We therefore disclaim responsibility for the contents of the items noted. The compilation was produced by Dr Byeong Hei Jun with additions made by Dr Christof Sauer.

### Free to worship - Set my people free to worship me

An annual world wide protest against the apostasy law in the Muslim world on Easter Saturday, will be held for the first time on 3 April 2010 with demonstrations in New York, London, Cairo, Khartoum, Juba, Berlin, Melbourne and in a number of other cities around the world at 12:00PM local time. You can join a protest or organise your own in your hometown or in a nearby city.

This is a whole new dimension compared to previous campaigns, e.g. by Open Doors (Secret Believers) and Barnabas Fund (Why should they be secret?).

The organizers write: In our rapidly changing world, religious values and human rights are being challenged. Every year thousands die because of persecution, injustice and oppression by governments and religious institutions. If we don't watch it, very soon justice and equality for all men and women will be usurped. In the Muslim world the Muslim people don't have the freedom to chose their faith. Stand up and speak out against the Muslim apostasy law worldwide. Show your solidarity for Christian brothers and sisters from Muslim background by wearing yellow and lighting up a candle! Show your protest!

#### Three focus areas of free to worship

I. Free To Worship wishes to uphold oppressed Muslims by requesting governments, policy makers and religious institutions worldwide to set free by:

Granting **freedom** to Muslim peoples –

- To convert (follow Jesus)
- To worship
- To raise their children in their faith

- To marry (for Christian women from a Muslim background to marry Christian men)
- II. We seek to abolish the crime of apostasy by amending government/religious laws pertaining to:
- Punishment of death for apostate
  - Confiscation of the wealth of the convert
  - Nullifying his or her marriage
  - Disqualifying him/her for the right of the custody of his/her children.
  - Depriving the apostate from his/her right in their inheritance
  - Punishment of (alta'ziz) or discipline
- III. We call on our national governments and the United Nations not to criminalise the defamation of all religions, in particular Islam. We believe in the freedom of thought, conscience, religion and speech.

Even though there were not many known Muslim converts to Christianity in Islamic countries twenty years ago, there are now open communities of apostates in almost every dominantly Muslim country. For example, conservative estimates suggest that there are at least 70,000 Muslim-background Christians in Algeria alone. Therefore, as the number of Muslim-background Christians grow, apostasy is fast becoming a large scale global problem.

This is due to the fact that Islam is a one way street. You are allowed to convert to Islam but you are not allowed to convert from Islam. However, things are beginning to change as Muslims desire the freedom of religion without fear, harassment and violence.

### **Will you Uphold the Oppressed?**

Set My People Free is a network of individuals, churches and organisations working for the freedom of religious converts to live and practice their faith, to experience equality and justice in their home countries. We are a non-violent movement seeking freedom, justice, equality and reconciliation for religious converts. We are committed to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. You can sign an online petition on <http://www.petitiononline.com/2010smpf/petition.html>

For more information email:

SetMyPeopleFreeToWorshipMe@googlemail.com

## **Annual reports and global surveys**

### **International Religious Freedom Report 2009**

United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. October 26, 2009. [www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/index.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/index.htm). The report is submitted to Congress annually by the Department of State in compliance with the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. This report supplements the most recent Human Rights Reports by providing additional detailed information with respect to matters involving international religious freedom. It includes individual country chapters on the status of religious freedom worldwide. The website links related material and speeches given on the occasion of the release of the report.

### **USCIRF - Annual Report 2009**

US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 1 May 2009. <http://tinyurl.com/USCIRF09>; home: [www.uscirtf.gov](http://www.uscirtf.gov). USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF's principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress. USCIRF continues to differ with the State Department over the assessment of religious freedom conditions in several of those countries and the policies that should be undertaken in response. USCIRF's own assessments are presented in greater detail in the 2009 Annual Report which provides evidence not included in the State Department Annual Report.

### **HRW World Report 2009**

Human Rights Watch, New York, 564 p. <http://tinyurl.com/hrwreport2009>; home: [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org). Human Rights Watch is dedicated to protecting the human rights of people around the world. This report covers the year 2008:

## **IARF - International Religious Freedom Report 2008**

International Association for Religious Freedom, London, September 2008, 7 p. <http://tinyurl.com/iarf2008>; home: [www.iarf.net](http://www.iarf.net). The IARF, founded in 1900, was one of the first international, inter-religious organisations in the world. While primarily founded by Unitarians and “liberal Christian thinkers” over 100 years ago, the organisation claims to since have grown to include major religious groups of many traditions, including Buddhist, Shinto, Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, and Jewish participants. It has over 90 affiliated member groups in approximately 25 countries.

## **Regional and country reports**

### **China: Congressional-Executive Commission on China**

Annual Report. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC. October 2009, 464 p. <http://tinyurl.com/CECC2009>. Pages 110-143 focus on religious freedom. Home: [www.cecc.gov](http://www.cecc.gov). The CECC was created by the US-Congress in October 2000 with the legislative mandate to monitor human rights and the development of the rule of law in China, and to submit an annual report to the President and the Congress. The website contains numerous reports and papers, among others a “Partial list of political prisoners known or believed to be detained or imprisoned in China as of October 7, 2009” (1,279 cases).

### **Kyrgyzstan: Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations**

OSCE/ODIHR Advisory Council on Freedom of Religion or Belief, October 2008, 33p. <http://tinyurl.com/osce2008>; home: [www.legislationline.org](http://www.legislationline.org). This assessment is based on the proposed law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations in the Kyrgyz Republic” (the “proposed draft law”) that was submitted to the OSCE Mission in Bishkek in July 2008 by the Speaker of the Kyrgyz Parliament with a request for comments. The present opinion, which was prepared by the OSCE/ODIHR Advisory Council on Freedom of Religion or Belief (the “Advisory Council”) in co-operation with the Venice Commission, was adopted by the Commission at its 76th Plenary Session (Venice, 17-18 October 2008). One of the most

fundamental international standards concerns the right to internal freedom of belief, so-called *forum internum*.

### **Malaysia: Religious freedom**

European Centre for Law and Justice, Universal Periodic Review 2009, Strasbourg, France, 13 p. <http://tinyurl.com/ecljmalaysia2009>; home: [www.eclj.org](http://www.eclj.org). The language of the Constitution provides every religious group with “the right to manage its own religious affairs, to establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes, and to acquire and own property and hold and administer it in accordance with law. Though it is lawful for both the Malaysian Federation and individual states to establish Islamic institutions and to provide instruction in the religion of Islam,” every religious group has the right to establish and maintain institutions for the education of children in its own religion (:1).

### **Saudi Arabia: Religious freedom in the Saudi Arabia**

European Centre for Law and Justice, Universal Periodic Review 2009, Strasbourg, France, 18 p. <http://tinyurl.com/ecljsaudi-arabia2009>; home: [eclj.org](http://eclj.org). Strict Islamic law governs, and as such, the Saudi Constitution does not permit religious freedom. Even the practice of Islam itself is limited to the strict, Saudi-specific interpretation of Islam. Importantly, the Saudi government makes essentially no distinction between religion and government (:1).

### **Turkey: Forum 18 Religious Freedom survey**

November 2009. <http://tinyurl.com/F18-Turk09>; home: [www.forum18.org](http://www.forum18.org). “Ahead of the UN Human Rights Council May 2010 Universal Periodic Review of Turkey, Forum 18 News Service has found that the country continues to see serious violations of international human rights standards on freedom of religion or belief. A long-standing crucially important issue, with many implications, is that Turkey has not legally recognised religious communities in their own right as independent communities with full legal status - such as the right to own places of worship and the legal protection religious communities normally have in states under the rule of law. Additionally, the most dangerous threat to individuals exercising freedom of religion or belief has been a series of violent attacks and murders on those perceived as threats; in recent years the victims have been Christians.”

### **Turkey: Religious Freedom Project for the Ecumenical Patriarchate**

Order of Saint Andrew the Apostle, Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate [www.archons.org](http://www.archons.org). The Order of St. Andrew conducts a major Religious Freedom Initiative in an attempt to safeguard the future of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul, whose existence is threatened by the persecutory policies of the government of Turkey. The website contains a number of documents on that regard.

### **USA: Proposed refugee admissions for fiscal year 2010: Report to the Congress**

United States Department of State, 59 p. <http://tinyurl.com/Refug2010>; home: [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov). This report includes information about specific measures taken to facilitate access to the United States refugee program for individuals who have fled countries of particular concern for violations of religious freedoms.

### **USA: Freedom of faith: Religious minorities in the United States**

U.S. Department of State, August 2008, vol. 13(8), 33 p. <http://tinyurl.com/america.gov2008>; home: [www.america.gov](http://www.america.gov). The monthly electronic journal of the U.S. Department of State dedicated an issue to above topic. With “a new wave of immigration and a unique cultural chemistry ... the principle of religious liberty will likely face new tests, but the noted experts ... express confidence that religious minorities in the 21st century and beyond will still find protection in the 18th century commitment to the principle of freedom of faith” (:1).

### **Vietnam: On the Margins: Rights abuses of ethnic Khmer in Mekong Delta**

Human Rights Watch, New York, January 2009, 109 p. <http://tinyurl.com/hrwvietnam2009>; home: [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org). This report documents ongoing violations of the rights of the Khmer Krom in Southern Vietnam and also abuses in Cambodia against Khmer Krom who have fled there for refuge. Vietnam has suppressed peaceful expressions of dissent and banned Khmer Krom human rights publications. It also tightly controls the Theravada Buddhism practised by the Khmer Krom, who see this form of Buddhism as the foundation of their distinct culture and ethnic identity. “In Vietnam, freedom of religion is



perceived as a privilege to be granted by the government rather than as an inalienable right, and religious activities deemed to threaten the authority of the Vietnamese Communist Party are banned or carefully monitored and controlled” (:6).

## Specific issues

### **A cry from Iran: A crime against humanity told through the eyes of victim's sons**

Directed by Martyr Haik Hovsepian's sons, JFA (Joseph Film & Animation) <[www.josephfilms.com](http://www.josephfilms.com)>. *A Cry from Iran* is the first of its kind: a documentary raising awareness about religious freedom in Iran. JFA Productions was founded in 2000 by Joseph Hovsepian. It is the world premiere of *A Cry from Iran*, a documentary offering a first-ever look at religious oppression in Iran. *A Cry from Iran* is the true story of Christian martyrs killed callously for the right to practice their chosen faith.

### **Becket Fund for Religious Liberty issues brief: “Defamation of religions”**

The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, Washington, DC, July 2008, 9 p. <http://tinyurl.com/becketfund>; home: [www.becketfund.org](http://www.becketfund.org). Religious freedom is best preserved through protection of religious exercise of people of all faiths, not through restricting the speech of people of some faiths. “Defamation of religion” laws claim to protect vulnerable religious communities and the civil dialogue.

### **The Institute on Religion & Public Policy**

Alexandria, Virginia, USA. [www.religionandpolicy.org](http://www.religionandpolicy.org). Having received two nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize, the Institute on Religion and Public Policy considers itself one of the world’s most effective and well-respected advocates for freedom of religion and belief. Founded in 1999, the Institute recognizes that religious freedom is more than just a church-state issue and therefore engages every segment of society to protect humankind’s most basic fundamental right: freedom of religion and belief. The Institute has a more overarching goal religious freedom advocacy groups: To create and strengthen legal, business, academic, media and other systems

within countries – and internationally – to protect religious freedom so such abuses do not occur. The website contains a wealth of country reports and an international database of ‘freedom data’ including religion legislation.

### **Islam in the classroom: What the textbooks tell us**

by Gilbert T. Sewall, American Textbook Council, New York, 2008, 41 p. <http://tinyurl.com/islamreport>; home: [www.historytextbooks.org](http://www.historytextbooks.org). The American Textbook Council was established in 1989 as an independent national research organization to review social studies textbooks and advance the quality of instructional materials in history. The volume does not explain, for example, that apostasy is officially a capital crime. Renunciation of Islam may be regarded as treason, not an act of conscience or personal choice. Nor does it explain, for example, that Saudi Arabia and Iran today exact the death penalty for homosexuality. It does not point out that freedom of religion is forbidden in nations throughout the Muslim world.

### **Re-imagining religious freedom**

by Sankrant Sanu, Manushi, New Delhi, No 150, 12 p. <http://tinyurl.com/manushi>; home: [www.manushi-india.org](http://www.manushi-india.org). “Freedom of religion means that the person is left free to explore his or her religious life without being challenged to change his or her religion. Such exploration need not be confined to any one religion, and may freely embrace the entire religious and philosophical heritage of humanity” (:11).

## Book reviews

### Featured topic: Freedom to believe for Muslims who leave Islam

There are increasing numbers of Muslims leaving Islam. And there have always been laws against and penalties for “apostasy” in Islam, up to the death penalty, applied in varying degrees of harshness in history by the respective state, families or society, in order to keep people from leaving Islam. Some Muslims are leaving Islam because they have discovered Christ. Usually, once they confess their new found faith openly and witness about it, they encounter the severest repression.

**Brother Andrew & Al Janssen: Secret believers. What happens when Muslims turn to Christ?** Grand Rapids: Revell 2007, 272 p., hardcover, ISBN 9780800718749, US\$19.99; Revell 2008, 265 p., paperback, ISBN 9780800732646, US\$ 14.99; London: Hodder & Stoughton 2008, 288 p., hardcover, ISBN 9780340909324, £7.99; Website related to the book: [www.secretbelievers.org](http://www.secretbelievers.org)

In order not to jeopardize anyone, the authors have constructed a narrative from true content, that reads like a fast-paced well written novel. Some of the characters are Butros, a Christian who seeks to assist new believers in the Muslim world, Ahmed, a young Muslim terrified by nightmares until he is introduced to Isa (Jesus), Mustafa, a former leader in a fundamentalist Muslim movement that persecuted Christians, Salima, a privileged young Muslim woman who is held captive by her family when they find a Bible in her possession. The story reveals the dynamics of spiritual search, the intricacies of oppression, freedom found through courageous faith and the tug of war between love and hate, in a moving way, more than a scholarly account could.

The last 33 pages under the heading “How shall we respond?” pose four challenges to Christians: (1) Do we see Muslims as enemies? Or are we seeking to win them to Christ? (2) Are we going to seek revenge when we are attacked? Should we not offer forgiveness instead? (3) What would happen if we accepted the challenge of Islam by striving as Christians to imitate Christ? (4) Are we really convinced that we are engaged in a spiritual war? If so, shouldn't we commit to a life of prayer? In this war are we willing to

do anything, even lay down our lives, if necessary, to advance the kingdom of God?

This is a highly recommendable book on a popular level written from a truly spiritual Christian attitude that anyone will understand. It has been translated into various languages.

**Christian Solidarity Worldwide (ed.): No place to call home. Experiences of apostates from Islam.** Failures of the International Community. New Malden, Surrey: CSW 2008, 116 p., Also available online: <http://tinyurl.com/CSW-Apostasy> [29 April 2008; 1.03MB PDF].

This report explores the human rights abuses suffered by people who left Islam. Apostates are subject to gross and wide-ranging human rights abuses including extra judicial killings by state-related agents or mobs; honour killings by family members; detention, imprisonment, torture, physical and psychological intimidation by security forces; the denial of access to judicial services and social services; the denial of equal employment or education opportunities; social pressure resulting in loss of housing and employment; and day-to-day discrimination and ostracism in education, finance and social activities.

The study explores the right to choose a religion, apostasy in Islamic theology and shari'a law, apostasy laws today, state responses to apostasy, social reactions to apostasy and life as Muslim-background Christian. Extensive appendices with cases, applicable secular and Islamic human rights documents, relevant provisions in constitutions, and a full listing of Qur'anic verses on religious freedom make valuable supplements.

This solidly researched and well documented report should not be underestimated. The 116 pages in small print on A4 size pages would make a regular book three times that volume.

**Abdullah Saeed & Hassan Saeed: Freedom of religion, apostasy and Islam.** Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate 2004, 227 p., ISBN 9780754630821, paperback £17.99.

This book is an example of Muslims discussing arguments for absolute freedom of religion and for discarding the punishment of apostasy. The authors are a professor of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Melbourne, Australia and the attorney general of the Maldives, respectively. They want to contribute to the thinking that

freedom of religion is a fundamental principle of Islam and that the death penalty for apostasy violates this principle. The discussion is a global one, while a third of the book is concerned with a case study on the multi-religious Muslim majority country Malaysia.

In this country another book by the former chief justice of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan from 1972 has been republished: **Sheik Abdur Rahman, Punishment of apostasy in Islam**. Revised edition. Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press, 2007, 184 p., ISBN 9789839541496, US\$ 12.00.

Also watch out for a title to appear in November / December 2009: **Patrick Sookhdeo: Freedom to believe - challenging Islam's apostasy law**. London: Isaac Publishing 2009, US\$ 14.99, £ 8.99.

**Jonathan Carswell & Joanna Wright: Married to a Martyr**. The authorised biography of a widow in Turkey. Milton Keynes: Authentic Media 2008, ISBN 9781850787853, £ 8.99.

The murder of three Christians in Malatya, Turkey on 18 April 2007 on the premises of a small Christian publishing house is still under investigation before the courts. It successively emerges, that the murderers seem only to have been the puppets of higher placed people who see Christian witness and publishing as a threat to Turkish nationalism. This book tells the story of one of those murdered, Tilman Geske from Germany, from the perspective of his wife Susanne as written up by two young Christian writers from Northern Ireland.

Another book on one of the Turkish Christians murdered, Necati Aydin, so far has only appeared in German. It is written by his German brother-in-law, who was also to be killed, and covers Aydin's conversion, the situation of the church and converts in Turkey, social hostility and governmental discrimination and arrests: **Wolfgang Häde: Mein Schwager – ein Märtyrer. Die Geschichte des türkischen Christen Necati Aydin**. Schwarzenfeld, Germany: Neufeld Verlag, 2009, 109 p., € 9.90.

**Marshall, Paul A (ed.): Religious freedom in the world**. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield 2007, 499 p., ISBN 9780742562127, US\$ 78.89, Published in cooperation with the Center for Religious Freedom at the Hudson Institute.

In 2000 Marshall, then still at Freedom House, published 75 country profiles as *Religious Freedom in the World* from a religious freedom

and human rights perspective. The 2008 version of this massive global survey with the team of the Center for Religious Freedom now at the Hudson Institute, provides 101 country profiles, thereby covering 95% of the world's population. The range of questions for country experts has been expanded, adding more questions on the economic dimensions such as job discrimination. For a complementary check of the situation with a different methodology additional questionnaires developed by Brian Grim have been used. The approach of the compendium represents real scholarly progress. Different from the earlier books is the focus on religious freedom in general instead of solely on the persecution of Christians in particular. The country profiles were written by a whole team of authors and further processed in a cooperative manner. They follow clear definitions of the issues, and the authors operated with a published set of criteria for a coherent narrative and a quite comprehensive set of 112 questions on the infringements of religious freedom rights.

This reference work has set a standard for country profiles which should be taken as a benchmark. Whether the criteria are comprehensive enough in all cases for profiling the persecution of Christians from a Christian perspective, or whether a Christian theological angle needs to be added, has to be assessed. As there are for example cases which Christians consider as persecution from a theological perspective, which are not infringements of religious freedom according to international human rights standards, it is likely that further work on a comprehensive set of descriptors of persecution from a Christian theological perspective is needed.

The country profiles unfortunately do not provide any references or bibliography, which has already been used as a cheap excuse against the validity of the contents by representatives of a country that scores badly. However, when one scrutinizes other reports available on the internet, the country profiles seem very reasonably compiled.

The first 54 pages of the book contain a number of analytical summaries by Marshall and others on the range of religious freedom, "secular and religious, church and state", religious freedom and national security, religious freedom and socio-economic wellbeing, economics and religions, as well as regional surveys on the Middle East, Europe, the Balkans and Southeastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union. This is a very valuable addition, as some of this

material will outlive the country profiles which will soon become dated.

This commendable reference work is the best on its topic, currently the most up to date and a must for any reference library.

*Dr Christof Sauer, Cape Town, South Africa*

## Recent books of interest and some classics

Lori G Beaman: *Defining harm: religious freedom and the limits of the law*. (Law and society series). UBC Press 2008, 185 p., ISBN 9780774814294.

Stephen B Bevans, Jeffrey Gros: *Evangelization and Religious Freedom: Ad Gentes, Dignitatis Humanae*. Rediscovering Vatican II. Paulist Press 2008, 259 p., ISBN 9780809142026.

Charlene Burns: *More Moral Than God: Taking Responsibility for Religious Violence*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2008, 147 p., ISBN 9780742558687.

Keith E Eitel (ed.): *Missions in contexts of violence*. (Evangelical Missiological Society Series, 15) Pasadena: William Carey Library 2008, 415 p., US\$ 14.99, ISBN978-0-87808-389-3.

Tibebe Eshete: *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia: Resistance and Resilience*. Baylor University Press, 2009, 480 p., ISBN 9781602580022.

Paul Estabrooks & Jim Cunningham: *Standing strong through the storm*. Santa Ana, CA: Open Doors 2004, 386 p. (www.od.org) – A study guide for Christians to understand and withstand persecution.

Mike Falkenstine: *The Chinese Puzzle*. Xulon Press 2008, 152 p., ISBN 9781606471432. - About the church in China by China Resource Center.

Rosalind I J Hackett: *Proselytization Revisited: Rights Talk, Free Markets and Culture Wars*. Equinox 2008, 480 p., ISBN 9781845532277.

Jeffrey Haynes: *Routledge handbook of religion and politics*. Taylor & Francis, 2008, 448 p., ISBN 9780415414555.

- Craig Hovey: *To Share in the Body*. Brazos Press, 2008, 157 p., ISBN 9781587432170. - Theological reflection on martyrdom in the Gospel of Mark.
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## Introducing the International Institute for Religious Freedom

The International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) is an Institute of the World Evangelical Alliance and its Religious Liberty Commission with the aim of working towards:

- The establishment of reliable facts on the restriction of religious freedom worldwide;
- The introduction of the subject of religious freedom into academic research and theological curricula;
- The study of pastoral issues relating to those who are affected.

**IIRF** exists to cultivate the understanding of religious freedom. It affirms the right to religious freedom for all people, particularly for Christians.

**IIRF** maintains a global network of researchers and experts and seeks to ensure that:

- Its work covers religious freedom concerns wherever they occur in the world,
- It serves persecuted believers and academics studying religious freedom wherever they are located. Publications and other research will be made available as cheaply and readily as possible.

**IIRF** aims to work collaboratively with all who share its aims of supporting religious freedom through providing the necessary foundations of accurate information and understanding.

**IIRF**'s academic approach is inter-disciplinary, appreciating the contributions that different disciplines add to the understanding of and response to religious freedom issues. It will maintain a balance, in particular, between theological, legal and political study.

**IIRF** differentiates between advocating the rights of members of other religions (religious freedom) and evaluating the truth of their beliefs (religious truth). Advocating the freedom of others can be done without accepting the truth of what they believe. IIRF encourages all activities that contribute to the understanding of religious freedom. These include :

1. Dissemination of existing literature, information about archives, compilation of bibliographies etc.
2. Production and dissemination of new papers, journals and books
3. Gathering and analysis of statistics and stories

4. Supplying of ideas and materials to universities, seminaries and Bible colleges to encourage the inclusion of religious freedom issues into curricula
5. Networking to find, support and involve researchers in the work of IIRF, including the creation of research groups
6. Attendance at key events that provide an opportunity to strengthen connections with the wider religious liberty community and with politicians, diplomats and media with an interest in human rights

The IIRF is guided by the principles (1) of the Old and New Testament, which anchor human freedom in the person and nature of the creator God, and (2) the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which enshrines the universality of human rights, including such core values as non-discrimination, equality and fairness. We recognise the need to affirm and proclaim the divinely appointed universal principles of justice, freedom and equality for all in a world threatened by religious division.

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Friedrichstr. 38  
2nd Floor  
53111 Bonn  
**Germany**  
Bonn@iirf.eu  
www.iirf.eu

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Cape Town  
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## Call for submissions and instructions to contributors

The *IJRF* aims to provide a platform for scholarly discourse on the issue of religious freedom in general and the persecution of Christians in particular. The term persecution is understood broadly and inclusively by the editors. The *IJRF* is an interdisciplinary, international, peer reviewed, scholarly journal, serving the practical interests of religious freedom and is envisaged to become a premier publishing location for research articles, documentation, book reviews and academic news on the issue.

The editors welcome the submission of any item that could contribute to the journal. All research articles are expected to conform to the following requirements:

### Criteria for articles

Focus	Does the article have a clear focus on religious freedom/ religious persecution/ suffering because of religious persecution? These terms are understood broadly and inclusively by the editors of <i>IJRF</i> , but these terms clearly do not include everything.
Scholarly standard	Is the scholarly standard of a research article acceptable? Does it contribute something substantially new to the debate?
Clarity of argument	Is it well structured, including sub-headings where appropriate?
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Substantiation /Literature consulted	Does the author consult sufficient and most current literature? Are claims thoroughly substantiated throughout and reference to sources and documentation made?

## Submission procedure

1. Contributions may be submitted in paper form or by e-mail to:  
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2. The **deadlines** for the submission of academic articles are 1 February and 1 August respectively for the next issue and a month later for smaller items such as book reviews, noteworthy items, event reports, etc.
3. A statement whether an item is being submitted elsewhere or has been previously published must accompany the article.
4. Research articles will be sent to up to three independent referees. Upon receiving the reports from the referees, authors will be notified of the decision of the editorial committee, which may include a statement indicating changes or improvements that are required before publication.
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  - Brief biographical details of the author in the first footnote, linked to the name of the author, indicating, among others, year of birth, the institutional affiliation, special connection to the topic, and e-mail address.
7. Contributors will be informed if their article is not accepted for publication, but a hard copy will not be returned to them.
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9. Research articles should have a minimum length of 4 000 words. Articles longer than 10 000 words are not normally accepted, but a

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10. Research articles are honoured with two complimentary printed copies.

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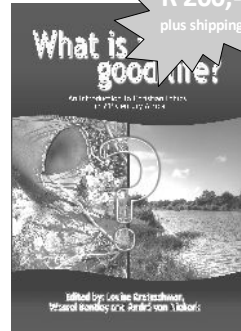
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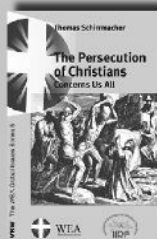
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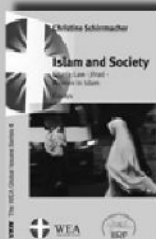
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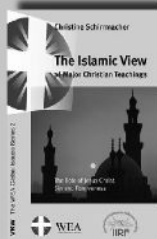
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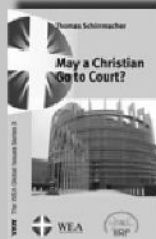
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