

2015

# Freedom of Belief & Christian Mission

Hans Aage Gravaas

Christof Sauer

Tormod Engelsviken

Maqsood Kamil

Knud Jorgensen

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/re2010series>



Part of the [Missions and World Christianity Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Gravaas, Hans A., Christof Sauer, Tormod Engelsviken, Maqsood Kamil, and Knud Jorgensen. 2015. "Freedom of Belief & Christian Mission." Volume 28. <https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/re2010series/27>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Holy Spirit Research Center at Digital Showcase. It has been accepted for inclusion in Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series by an authorized administrator of Digital Showcase. For more information, please contact [thorner@oru.edu](mailto:thorner@oru.edu).



Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series


VOLUME 28



# Freedom of Belief & Christian Mission



**Edited By**



**Hans Aage Gravaas, Christof Sauer,  
Tormod Engelsviken, Maqsood Kamil  
and Knud Jørgensen**

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

REGNUM EDINBURGH CENTENARY SERIES  
Volume 28

# Freedom of Belief and Christian Mission

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

## REGNUM EDINBURGH CENTENARY SERIES

The centenary of the World Missionary Conference of 1910, held in Edinburgh, was a suggestive moment for many people seeking direction for Christian mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Several different constituencies within world Christianity held significant events around 2010. From 2005, an international group worked collaboratively to develop an intercontinental and multi-denominational project, known as Edinburgh 2010, based at New College, University of Edinburgh. This initiative brought together representatives of twenty different global Christian bodies, representing all major Christian denominations and confessions, and many different strands of mission and church life, to mark the centenary.

Essential to the work of the Edinburgh 1910 Conference, and of abiding value, were the findings of the eight think-tanks or ‘commissions’. These inspired the idea of a new round of collaborative reflection on Christian mission – but now focused on nine themes identified as being key to mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The study process was polycentric, open-ended, and as inclusive as possible of the different genders, regions of the world, and theological and confessional perspectives in today’s church. It was overseen by the Study Process Monitoring Group: Miss Maria Aranzazu Aguado (Spain, The Vatican), Dr Daryl Balia (South Africa, Edinburgh 2010), Mrs Rosemary Dowsett (UK, World Evangelical Alliance), Dr Knud Jørgensen (Norway, Areopagos), Rev John Kafwanka (Zambia, Anglican Communion), Rev Dr Jooseop Keum (Korea, World Council of Churches), Dr Wonsuk Ma (Korea, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies), Rev Dr Kenneth R. Ross (UK, Church of Scotland), Dr Petros Vassiliadis (Greece, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki), and co-ordinated by Dr Kirsteen Kim (UK, Edinburgh 2010).

These publications reflect the ethos of Edinburgh 2010 and will make a significant contribution to ongoing studies in mission. It should be clear that material published in this series will inevitably reflect a diverse range of views and positions. These will not necessarily represent those of the series’ editors or of the Edinburgh 2010 General Council, but in publishing them the leadership of Edinburgh 2010 hopes to encourage conversation between Christians and collaboration in mission. All the series’ volumes are commended for study and reflection in both church and academy.

### Series Editors

Knud Jørgensen	Former Chair of Edinburgh 2010 Study Process Monitoring Group, MF Norwegian School of Theology
Kirsteen Kim	Leeds Trinity University and former Edinburgh 2010 Research Co-ordinator, UK
Wonsuk Ma	Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, Oxford, UK
Tony Gray	Words by Design, Bicester, UK

REGNUM EDINBURGH CENTENARY SERIES

Volume 28

# **Freedom of Belief and Christian Mission**

Edited by  
Hans Aage Gravaas, Christof Sauer,  
Tormod Engelsviken, Maqsood Kamil  
and Knud Jørgensen

Copyrighted Material

Copyright © Hans Aage Gravaas, Christof Sauer, Tormod Engelsviken,  
Maqsood Kamil and Knud Jørgensen 2015

First published 2015 by Regnum Books International  
Regnum is an imprint of the Oxford Centre for Mission  
Studies St Philip and St James Church  
Woodstock Road  
Oxford OX2 6HR, UK  
[www.ocms.ac.uk/regnum](http://www.ocms.ac.uk/regnum)

09 08 07 06 05 04 03 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The rights of Hans Aage Gravaas, Christof Sauer, Tormod Engelsviken, Maqsood Kamil and Knud Jørgensen to be identified as the Editors of this Work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

*All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electric, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying. In the UK such licences are issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1P 9HE.*

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-908355-86-7

Typeset by Words by Design  
Printed and bound in Great Britain for Regnum Books International  
by TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

Front cover photo by (Rev.) Ingvar A Isene,  
Stefanus Alliance International, used with permission.

This volume is a joint publication with the Stefanus Alliance International, Norway.
--

# CONTENTS

<b>Preface: Edinburgh 2010 Common Call</b>	ix
<b>Foreword</b>	
Heiner Bielefeldt	xiii
<b>Editorial Introduction: Freedom of Belief and Christian Mission: A difficult time for freedom of religion</b>	
Knud Jørgensen	xv
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	
<b>Freedom of Religion or Belief from a Human Rights Perspective</b>	
Tore Lindholm	3
<b>Freedom of Religion or Belief from a Biblical Perspective</b>	
Thomas Schirrmacher and Richard Howell	18
<b>Global Challenges and Opportunities in Religious Liberty</b>	
Brian Grim	30
HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS	
<b>A Doxological Framework for Interpreting Discrimination, Persecution and Martyrdom</b>	
Christof Sauer and Dwi Maria Handayani	47
<b>A Theology of Martyrdom</b>	
Agne Nordlander	58
<b>Mission, Persecution and Martyrdom in the Early Church</b>	
James J. Stamoolis	67
<b>The Era of Constantine</b>	
Maximilian J. Hölzl	79
<b>Mission, Human Rights and Religious Freedom – A Relationship of Light and Shadow: Historical, Ecumenical and Interreligious Perspectives</b>	
Dietrich Werner	93
<b>Christians in a Minority Situation</b>	
Knud Jørgensen	114



<b>Religious Persecution and Violence in the 21st Century</b> <b>A Global Survey Based on the World Watch List</b>	
Frans Veerman	127
<b>Mission and Ethics of Mission 2014</b>	
Christian Troll and Thomas Schirmacher	149
CASE STUDIES	
<b>Egypt – the Church under Pressure</b>	
Cornelis Hulsman and Ramez Atallah	167
<b>Christians in Turkey as Part of a Western Conspiracy?</b> <b>A Turkish Perspective on Christian Missionaries</b>	
Wolfgang Häde	181
<b>The Middle East: A Region without a Christian Future?</b>	
Hanna Josua	190
<b>Case Study: Israel and Messianic Jews</b>	
Dan Sered and Yoel Ben-David	214
<b>The Decline of Ancient North African Christianity</b> <b>through the Impact of Islam</b>	
Bernd Brandl	227
<b>Marxism and Religion: The Paradox of Church Growth</b> <b>in Ethiopia, 1974-1991</b>	
Tibebe Eshete	242
<b>Freedom of Belief and the Church in Eritrea</b>	
Kjetil Tronvoll and Daniel Rezene Mekonnen	259
<b>The Somali Conundrum: Christian Presence</b> <b>in Times of Peace and in Times of Turbulence</b>	
David W. Schenk and Peter M. Sensenig	270
<b>Religious Freedom and Christian Mission:</b> <b>People's Republic of China</b>	
Kim-kwong Chan	283
<b>Beset from Within, Beleaguered from Without: North Korea's</b> <b>Catacombs in an Era of Extermination</b>	
Tim A. Peters	295
<b>Is the Silk Road still Open? Central Asia: Christian Mission</b> <b>under Growing Restrictions on Religious Freedom</b>	
Annetta Vysotskaya	309

<b>India: Religious Polarisation in a Hindu Context</b>	
Siga Arles	320
<b>Mission and Persecution – Parallel Stories: The State of Religious Minorities in Burma</b>	
Kristin Storaker	331
<b>Religious Freedom in Indonesia, the World's Most Populous Muslim State</b>	
Jeff Hammond	344
<b>Faith and Freedom in the Land of the Pure</b>	
Maqsood Kamil	356
<b>Freedom of Religion and Christian Mission in Russia before and after the Era of the Soviet Union</b>	
Valentin Kozhuharov	370
<b>Western Europe – Marginalisation of Christians through Secularisation?</b>	
Lars Dahle	382
<b>Religious Freedom in Brazil and Latin America</b>	
Felipe Augusto Lopes Carvalho and Uziel Santana dos Santos	395
MISSIOLOGICAL RESPONSES	
<b>Free to Believe and To Do Mission Worldwide</b>	
Hans Aage Gravaas	413
<b>Do Christian Witness and Mission Provoke Persecution?</b>	
Jan A.B. Jongeneel	430
<b>The Missionary Witness of the Persecuted and the Martyrs</b>	
Tite Tiénou	444
<b>Christian Solidarity in the Face of Discrimination and Persecution</b>	
Christof Sauer	452
<b>Bibliography</b>	465
<b>List of Contributors</b>	479
<b>Index</b>	491

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

## PREFACE

The Edinburgh 2010 Common Call emerged from the Edinburgh 2010 study process and conference marking the centenary of the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910. The Common Call, cited below, was affirmed in the Church of Scotland Assembly Hall in Edinburgh on 6 June 2010, by representatives of world Christianity, including Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and other major Protestant churches.

As we gather for the centenary of the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh 1910, we believe the church, as a sign and symbol of the reign of God, is called to witness to Christ today by sharing in God's mission of love through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

*1. Trusting in the Triune God and with a renewed sense of urgency, we are called to incarnate and proclaim the good news of salvation, of forgiveness of sin, of life in abundance, and of liberation for all poor and oppressed. We are challenged to witness and evangelism in such a way that we are a living demonstration of the love, righteousness and justice that God intends for the whole world.*

*2. Remembering Christ's sacrifice on the Cross and his resurrection for the world's salvation, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are called to authentic dialogue, respectful engagement and humble witness among people of other faiths – and no faith – to the uniqueness of Christ. Our approach is marked with bold confidence in the gospel message; it builds friendship, seeks reconciliation and practises hospitality.*

*3. Knowing the Holy Spirit who blows over the world at will, reconnecting creation and bringing authentic life, we are called to become communities of compassion and healing, where young people are actively participating in mission, and women and men share power and responsibilities fairly, where there is a new zeal for justice, peace and the protection of the environment, and renewed liturgy reflecting the beauties of the Creator and creation.*

*4. Disturbed by the asymmetries and imbalances of power that divide and trouble us in church and world, we are called to repentance, to critical reflection on systems of power, and to accountable use of power structures. We are called to find practical ways to live as members of One Body in full awareness that God resists the proud, Christ welcomes and empowers the poor and afflicted, and the power of the Holy Spirit is manifested in our vulnerability.*

*5. Affirming the importance of the biblical foundations of our missional engagement and valuing the witness of the Apostles and martyrs, we are called to rejoice in the expressions of the gospel in many nations all over the world. We celebrate the renewal experienced through movements of migration and mission in all directions, the way all are equipped for*

*mission by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and God's continual calling of children and young people to further the gospel.*

*6. Recognising the need to shape a new generation of leaders with authenticity for mission in a world of diversities in the twenty-first century, we are called to work together in new forms of theological education. Because we are all made in the image of God, these will draw on one another's unique charisms, challenge each other to grow in faith and understanding, share resources equitably worldwide, involve the entire human being and the whole family of God, and respect the wisdom of our elders while also fostering the participation of children.*

*7. Hearing the call of Jesus to make disciples of all people – poor, wealthy, marginalised, ignored, powerful, living with disability, young, and old – we are called as communities of faith to mission from everywhere to everywhere. In joy we hear the call to receive from one another in our witness by word and action, in streets, fields, offices, homes, and schools, offering reconciliation, showing love, demonstrating grace and speaking out truth.*

*8. Recalling Christ, the host at the banquet, and committed to that unity for which he lived and prayed, we are called to ongoing co-operation, to deal with controversial issues and to work towards a common vision. We are challenged to welcome one another in our diversity, affirm our membership through baptism in the One Body of Christ, and recognise our need for mutuality, partnership, collaboration and networking in mission, so that the world might believe.*

*9. Remembering Jesus' way of witness and service, we believe we are called by God to follow this way joyfully, inspired, anointed, sent and empowered by the Holy Spirit, and nurtured by Christian disciplines in community. As we look to Christ's coming in glory and judgment, we experience his presence with us in the Holy Spirit, and we invite all to join with us as we participate in God's transforming and reconciling mission of love to the whole creation.*

### **Themes Explored**

The 2010 conference was shaped around the following nine study themes:

1. Foundations for mission
2. Christian mission among other faiths
3. Mission and post-modernities
4. Mission and power
5. Forms of missionary engagement
6. Theological education and formation
7. Christian communities in contemporary contexts
8. Mission and unity – ecclesiology and mission
9. Mission spirituality and authentic discipleship

### **The Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series to Date**

Against this background a series of books was commissioned, with the intention of making a significant contribution to ongoing studies of mission. This series currently includes:<sup>1</sup>

*Edinburgh 2010: Mission Then and Now*, David A. Kerr and Kenneth R. Ross (eds).

*Edinburgh 2010 Volume II: Witnessing to Christ Today*, Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim (eds).

*Mission Continues: Global Impulses for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Claudia Wahrisch-Oblau and Fidon Mwombeki (eds).

*Holistic Mission: God's Plan for God's People*, Brian Woolnough and Wonsuk Ma (eds).

*Mission Today and Tomorrow*, Kirsteen Kim and Andrew Anderson (eds).

*The Church Going Local: Mission and Globalization*, Tormod Engelsviken, Erling Lundebj and Dagfinn Solheim (eds).

*Evangelical and Frontier Mission: Perspectives on the Global Progress of the Gospel*, A. Scott Moreau and Beth Snodderly (eds).

*Interfaith Relations after One Hundred Years: Christian Mission among Other Faiths*, Marina Ngursangzeli Behera (ed).

*Witnessing to Christ in a Pluralistic Age: Christian Mission among Other Faiths*, Lalsangkima Pachuau and Knud Jørgensen (eds).

*Mission and Post Modernities*, Rolv Olsen (ed).

*A Learning Missional Church: Reflections from Young Missiologists*, Beate Fagerli, Knud Jørgensen, Rolv Olsen, Kari Storstein Haug and Knut Tveitereid (eds).

*Life-Widening Mission: Global Anglican Perspectives*, Cathy Ross (ed).

*Foundations for Mission*, Emma Wild-Wood and Peniel Rajkumar (eds).

*Mission Spirituality and Authentic Discipleship*, Wonsuk Ma and Kenneth R. Ross (eds).

*A Century of Catholic Missions*, Stephen Bevans (ed).

*Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation*, Robert Schreiter and Knud Jørgensen (eds).

*Orthodox Perspectives on Mission*, Petros Vassiliadis (ed).

*Bible in Mission*, Pauline Hoggarth, Fergus Macdonald, Knud Jørgensen and Bill Mitchell (eds).

*Pentecostal Mission and Global Christianity*, Wonsuk Ma, Veli-Matti Karkkainen and J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (eds).

*Engaging the World: Christian Communities in Contemporary Global Society*, Afe Adogame, Janice McLean and Anderson Jeremiah (eds).

*Mission At and From the Margins: Patterns, Protagonists and Perspectives*, Peniel Rajkumar, Joseph Dayam, I.P. Asheervadham (eds).

*The Lausanne Movement: A Range of Perspectives*, Margunn Serigstad Dahle, Lars Dahle and Knud Jørgensen (eds).

---

<sup>1</sup> For an up-to-date list and full publication details, see [www.ocms.ac.uk/regnum/](http://www.ocms.ac.uk/regnum/)

*Global Diasporas and Mission*, Chandler H Im & Amos Yong (eds).

*Theology, Mission and Child: Global Perspectives*, B Prevette, K White,  
CR Velloso Ewell & DJ Konz (eds).

*Called to Unity for the Sake of Mission*, John Gibaut and Knud Jørgensen  
(eds).

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

## FOREWORD

Freedom of religion or belief has the status of an internationally guaranteed human right, enshrined, inter alia, in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. It covers a broad range of sub-freedoms, including freedom to search for an ultimate meaning in life, to express personal convictions or doubts, to communicate with others about issues of faith, to seek information about religions or belief systems, to remain within one's 'inherited' religion or to change it, to perform religious ceremonies and rituals, to gather together for purposes of worship and prayer, to socialise the younger generation, to build an appropriate community infrastructure, to run educational and charity organisations, to operate religious institutions without undue state interference etc. Freedom of religion or belief is exercised by individuals either alone or together with others and in private as well as in public. While respecting each individual human being as a right holder, in recognition of his or her inherent human dignity, freedom of religion or belief also has a strong communicative and community dimension.

Bearing witness about issues of faith constitutes an indispensable part of freedom of religion or belief. It is 'indispensable' in the strong sense of the word, meaning that failure to recognise this essential dimension would render freedom of religion or belief almost meaningless. Preventing people from expressing their faith publicly and sharing their religious convictions with others would amount to disrespecting their status as right holders in this area. Moreover, given the fact that many (albeit not all) religions request their followers to spread the message, preventative measures may even confront believers with the dilemma of having to choose between criminalisation and self-betrayal, which obviously runs counter to their freedom of religion or belief.

Falling within the *forum externum* part of freedom of religion or belief, the right to engage in missionary activities can be limited by the state, in accordance with criteria spelled out for this purpose in the respective international human rights provisions. While the *forum internum* is absolutely protected, external manifestations of freedom of religion or belief lack such an absolute status. This is a delicate issue, which warrants a high degree of empirical precision and normative diligence. Many governments see the possibility of imposing certain restrictions as a *carte blanche* to create broad anti-proselytism laws and policies. When visiting countries in my capacity as UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, I have identified many cases of unduly restrictive laws and practices in this regard. It therefore cannot be emphasised enough that from



a human rights perspective the relationship between freedom and limitation must be strictly understood as a relationship between rule and exception. The burden of argumentation falls on those who deem limitations necessary, not on those who exercise their guaranteed right to freedom of religion or belief. Many anti-proselytism laws fail to do justice to the spirit and letter of human rights, since they are vaguely defined and thereby opening the floodgates for all sorts of arbitrary restrictions and sanctions.

Unfortunately, problems also occur in liberal democracies where we are currently witnessing ideological trends, with the intention of delegitimising the right to engage in missionary activities. Some invoke 'freedom from religion' in order to argue that missionary activities should be prohibited or largely restricted. However, 'freedom from religion', which in fact constitutes the necessary negative flip side of freedom of religion, can only be invoked against coercion, in particular against all forms of state enforcement in issues of religion. It is not a claim to request in order to be spared any confrontation with publicly manifested religions or beliefs in the society. On the contrary, such manifestations deserve appreciation as a natural part of any pluralistic liberal society.

Freedom of religion or belief is a human right much under attack. In practice, this means that people who actively make use of this right may become targets of different degrees of abuse, ranging from spiteful and aggressive public comments to acts of killing and torture perpetrated by state agencies or non-state actors. Reporting about such incidents is an act of solidarity with the victims of human rights abuses, while at the same time reminding the international community of its obligations to honour a human right enshrined in legally binding conventions.

I would like to thank the editors and authors of this book for their commitment. While mostly coming from a Christian background, they contribute to raising awareness about the significance and challenges of a fundamental right to freedom belonging to human beings across all religious and denominational lines.

Heiner Bielefeldt,  
UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief

## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION: FREEDOM OF BELIEF AND CHRISTIAN MISSION

Late last fall I attended a hearing on freedom of religion and persecution of Christians, arranged by the Foreign Relations Committee in the Danish Parliament. The Director for the Danish Institute for Human Rights, Jonas Christoffersen, gave the audience an overview on conventions and realities in the work for human rights. He then concluded: 'It is going to the dogs with freedom of religion.' Research on freedom of religion (carried out among others by Pew Research, Human Rights Watch, the UN and the US Commissions on International Religious Freedom) shows that freedom of religion is either severely limited or non-existent in 64 out of the world's 198 states, i.e. in one third of the countries of the world (with 70% of the world's population).<sup>1</sup> Particularly in the Middle East and in North Africa, the problem has increased in the last couple of years, in connection with and as a consequence of the Arab Spring in 2010-11.

Another contributor to the Danish hearing, Lisbet Christoffersen, Professor of Rights, Religion and Society, had the following to say about the reasons for religious persecution in 2014:

- Governmental persecution: Baha'i, Sunni and Christians in Iran; Muslims, Buddhists, Falun Gong and house churches in China; Muslims in Myanmar/Burma; arbitrary and violent version of *shari'a* in Pakistan and African countries.
- Religious groups' purge of others: the former Yugoslavia, Islamic State (or IS) versus secular Muslims, Yazidis, Mandaeans, and Assyrians across the Middle East, converts and Christians in Pakistan, Christians and Muslims in India, Boko Haram versus Christians in Nigeria.
- Religious minorities being squeezed in civil wars – harassment, persecution? Christians, Alevis and secular in Syria; Christians in Iraq and Iran; Arab and Jewish Christians in Israel.
- Harassment/persecution of religious minorities: Copts in Egypt.
- State religions (Saudi Arabia) and state atheism (North Korea) with a ban on practising alternative ideologies.<sup>2</sup>

When it is going to the dogs, it is first and foremost a matter of things getting worse and worse; in particular, the persecution of Christians in

---

<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center: 'Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High' (Pew Research Center, January 2015): [www.pewforum.org/2014/01/14/religious-hostilities-reach-six-year-high](http://www.pewforum.org/2014/01/14/religious-hostilities-reach-six-year-high)

<sup>2</sup> Lisbet Christoffersen, 'Religiøs forfølgelse. Bidrag til åben høring i Folketingets Udenrigsudvalg 12.11.14', unpublished.

countries like Iraq, Syria and Egypt has been on the increase for several years. Iraq had almost two million Christian inhabitants when Saddam Hussein was overturned; today less than 100,000 are left. The rest have fled or have been killed. In Syria the ancient Nestorian and Monophysite churches (the Church of the East) have celebrated their last worship service in cities like Mosul. In the town of Raqqa in Syria, IS has given Christians the choice between converting to Islam or being declared enemies. In Egypt the Coptic Church tries to hold out, but many are considering a move to the West. Secondly, it is a matter of neither the UN nor the EU being able to agree on what to do. During the Danish hearing the question was raised as to whom one should put one's money on in the attempt to maintain and fight for freedom of religion. The answer was that politicians and governments could not agree and therefore the difficult times would continue.

This is the background for this volume: Christian mission takes place in a world where there are increasing interreligious tensions, including violence and persecution. Politics, economics, religion, ethnicity and other factors play a role in these tensions. Christians too are involved in such conflicts, sometimes as those who are persecuted and sometimes as those participating in violence. 'Freedom of religion and belief' is a core value in the UN Human Rights Declaration. At the same time, it is a core biblical value. Obstacles to and attacks on freedom of belief are therefore a central concern for witnessing to Christ.

The theme is not dealt with directly in the Edinburgh 2010 Common Call. Indirectly, it is reflected in statements like these:

Remembering Christ's sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection for the world's salvation, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are called to authentic dialogue, respectful engagement and humble witness among people of other faiths – and no faith – to the uniqueness of Christ. Our approach is marked with bold confidence in the Gospel message; it builds friendship, seeks reconciliation and practices hospitality.

Disturbed by the asymmetries and imbalances of power that divide and trouble us in church and world, we are called to repentance, to critical reflection on systems of power, and to accountable use of power structures. We are called to find practical ways to live as members of One Body in full awareness that God resists the proud, Christ welcomes and empowers the poor and afflicted, and the power of the Holy Spirit is manifested in our vulnerability.<sup>3</sup>

There is a plethora of documents and documentation on the topic. Among recent documents we particularly refer to:

World Council of Churches, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, World Evangelical Alliance, Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World. Recommendations for Conduct, 2011.

---

<sup>3</sup> See the Preface to this volume where the Edinburgh 2010 Common Call is printed.

Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Missionary Activities and Human Rights: Recommended Ground Rules for Missionary Activities, 2009.

The concern also received focused attention at the WCC Tenth Assembly in Busan, South Korea, in 2013. The Assembly adopted a *Statement on the Politicization of Religion and Rights of Religious Minorities*<sup>4</sup> which, inter alia, calls attention to a trend of politicisation of religion and the religionisation of politics. The trend is that politicisation of religion adds to political polarisation: ‘When religion becomes a dividing force in the social and political arena, in its more intensive and durable form, it can contribute to a religious chasm.’<sup>5</sup> This rising trend causes serious problems not only for Christians, but affects different religious communities who live as minorities in many areas of the world. The WCC statement:

1. Reaffirms the commitment of the WCC to the principle of the universal right of all persons to freedom of religion or belief;
2. Reiterates our conviction that the church is an important element in promoting and defending religious freedom and rights of religious minorities, based on its historic values and ethos of upholding human dignity and the human rights of every individual;
3. Recognises and reiterates that the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief should be the concern and work of the churches and the ecumenical community as part of their prophetic witness;
4. Calls upon WCC member-churches to engage actively in defending the rights of all religious minorities and their right to freedom of religion or belief, especially in opposing legislation or regulations that would limit religious freedom in contravention of international human rights standards;
5. Recognises the positive steps being taken by various states towards a fuller respect for freedom of religion or belief in a number of contexts;
6. Expresses grave concern on the increasing trend of politicisation of religion and religionisation of politics as well as the growing trend of terrorism that threatens the social fabric of a society and the peaceful co-existence of religious communities;
7. Expresses grave concern on state interference in the decision-making processes of religious groups, and the imposition of religious law and jurisprudence through state sanctions;
8. Calls upon the ecumenical community around the world to mediate with their respective governments to develop policies of providing

<sup>4</sup> [www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/politicisation-of-religion-and-rights-of-religious-minorities](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/politicisation-of-religion-and-rights-of-religious-minorities)

<sup>5</sup> Statement on the Politicisation of Religion and Rights of Religious Minorities, November 2013.

effective protection of persons and communities belonging to minority religions against threats or acts of violence from non-state actors.<sup>6</sup>

We further want to call attention to how the Cape Town Commitment highlights how ‘love works for religious freedom for all people’:

Upholding human rights by defending religious freedom is not incompatible with following the way of the cross when confronted with persecution. There is no contradiction between being willing personally to suffer the abuse or loss of our own rights for the sake of Christ, and being committed to advocate and speak up for those who are voiceless under the violation of their human rights. We must also distinguish between advocating the rights of people of other faiths and endorsing the truth of their beliefs. We can defend the freedom of others to believe and practise their religion without accepting that religion as true.

A) Let us strive for the goal of religious freedom for all people. This requires advocacy before governments on behalf of Christians and people of other faiths who are persecuted.

B) Let us conscientiously obey biblical teaching to be good citizens, to seek the welfare of the nation where we live, to honour and pray for those in authority, to pay taxes, to do good, and to seek to live peaceful and quiet lives. The Christian is called to submit to the state, unless the state commands what God forbids, or prohibits what God commands. If the state thus forces us to choose between loyalty to itself and our higher loyalty to God, we must say No to the state because we have said Yes to Jesus Christ as Lord.<sup>7</sup>

Even more important in our context is how the Cape Town Commitment calls us to suffer and sometimes to die for the Gospel:

Suffering may be necessary in our missionary engagement as witnesses to Christ, as it was for his apostles and the Old Testament prophets. Being willing to suffer is an acid test for the genuineness of our mission. God can use suffering, persecution and martyrdom to advance his mission. ‘Martyrdom is a form of witness which Christ has promised especially to honour.’ Many Christians living in comfort and prosperity need to hear again the call of Christ to be willing to suffer for him. For many other believers live in the midst of such suffering as the cost of bearing witness to Jesus Christ in a hostile religious culture. They may have seen loved ones martyred, or endured torture or persecution because of their faithful obedience, yet continue to love those who have so harmed them.

A) We hear and remember with tears and prayer the testimonies of those who suffer for the Gospel. We pray for grace and courage, along with them, to ‘love our enemies’ as Christ commanded us. We pray that the Gospel may bear fruit in places that are so hostile to its messengers. As we rightly grieve for those who suffer, we remember the infinite grief God feels over those

<sup>6</sup> [www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/politicisation-of-religion-and-rights-of-religious-minorities](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/politicisation-of-religion-and-rights-of-religious-minorities)

<sup>7</sup> [www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment](http://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment)

who resist and reject his love, his gospel and his servants. We long for them to repent and be forgiven and find the joy of being reconciled to God.<sup>8</sup>

*We want to emphasize that this understanding of suffering as an integral part of the life and the mission of a Christian is central to this volume.* Tite Tiénou, in his chapter on *The Missionary Witness of the Persecuted and the Martyrs*, states this in the following way:

The persecuted and the martyrs offer Christians lessons on the basics about suffering in the human condition and the basics regarding suffering in biblical revelation. When Christians return to basics about suffering in the human condition, both in the present world and in history, they will have to accept the reality of suffering as normal in human societies from Genesis 3 until the end of this age. The acceptance of this reality can create, I think, a different and healthier mind-set as Christians engage in mission. They will think less of suffering as something exceptional or as something to be explained. Instead, they might seek ways to learn important lessons through suffering.<sup>9</sup>

The purpose of this volume on *Freedom of Belief and Christian Mission* is to bring to public attention a broad overview on the history, development and perspectives on the role of mission and freedom of belief and to reflect on these issues within a context of authentic witness in mission.

Our aim has been at a readable and accessible book, using language and concepts that also can open this landscape to users who do not have a theology or missiology degree.

The understanding of ‘mission’ undergirding this book reflects the Common Call from Edinburgh 2010 (see Preface).

We have worked hard to produce a volume with broad participation and broad perspectives. The book includes both scholarly and practical input on various aspects of the topic and from various parts of the world. There is, as far as we know, no other conceptual treatment of this issue from such a broad ecumenical perspective.

In our work and reflections certain concerns have been central:

- As the title of the book is ‘Freedom of Belief and Christian Mission’, all aspects of the book relates to Christian mission in one way or another. All authors are therefore well versed in Christian mission.
- Balance has been essential: Christians are being persecuted, but are also persecuting – today and throughout history.
- Correct language is essential: ‘manslaughter’, ‘political dictatorship’, ‘persecution’ can often be loaded terms. We have therefore admonished the contributors to avoid such terms as much as possible.

<sup>8</sup> [www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment](http://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment)

<sup>9</sup> See Tite Tiénou, ‘The Missionary Witness of the Persecuted and Martyrs’ in this volume, and Agne Nordlander, ‘A Theology of Martyrdom’, also in this volume.

- One problem with the human rights perspective is that human rights are quite often viewed as manufactured by Christians. We have therefore tried to show the universality of human rights while agreeing they are rooted in Christian tradition.
- We have admonished contributors to struggle with the question: Why do churches and missions in the global North show less concern for freedom of religion in the global South than for religious freedom in the global North?
- An essential concern and challenge is the question: How may Christians defend the freedom of belief of others?

The volume contains four main sections: The first section lays out the 'theoretical framework' and deals with freedom of religion from a human rights and a biblical perspective. Added to this is a chapter on 'Global Challenges and Opportunities in Religious Liberty'. The second section on 'historical and theological reflections' takes us on a tour through history and highlights key issues such as mission and ethics. Then follows a number of case studies from around the globe. The questions we have asked the authors of the case studies to consider include:

Guiding question: How does freedom of belief and Christian mission relate to one another in the country in question?

1. How is Christian witness affected by restrictions on freedom of belief or social hostilities?
2. Who is affected by this: Historic churches, non-traditional churches, recent converts, expatriate/migrant Christians, state-controlled churches, underground or non-registered churches?
3. Which aspect of freedom of belief is restricted or attacked: Having a belief, changing a belief, propagating a belief, exercising a belief privately, publicly or in community? Collective rights of Christian churches, e.g. property, self-determination? Is registration of churches used for repression?
4. How are Christian mission and witness practised in that context?

In the final section we have collected some 'missiological responses' to the first three sections. This section is therefore intended both to summarise and to paint scenarios for the present and the future.

As we have worked on the volume we have related to existing networks – e.g. World Evangelical Alliance ([www.worldea.org](http://www.worldea.org)) and its spokesperson for Human Rights, Thomas Schirrmacher ([www.thomasschirrmacher.net](http://www.thomasschirrmacher.net); [www.bucer.eu](http://www.bucer.eu)) and the study group in IAMS (International Association of Mission Studies) under the leadership of Christof Sauer, IIRF (International Institute for Religious Freedom). We are also cognizant of relevant research from various sources, e.g. [www.pewforum.org](http://www.pewforum.org).<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> See also Brian J. Grim: <http://scholar.google.com/citations?user=UVC-2SIAAAAJ&hl=no>

Allow me to return to the beginning: On my way home from the hearing in Copenhagen I ended up in a taxi with a talkative Pakistan driver. It was snowing so we had to queue for some time. ‘So you have been attending a hearing on the persecution of Christians in the Middle East? But why have you Christians invaded Muslim territory? We don’t need more crusades.’ I began cautiously to tell the history – how the Middle East and North Africa had been Christian lands when Islam invaded the region in the seventh century. My taxi-driver who clearly was well educated, got confused: ‘There was nothing about this in our books in school. I have always believed that Christianity was about the Crusades in the 12th century.’ While the meter kept ticking, I told him about the church in the East which at times was larger than the church in the West, about how Nestorian and Jacobite Christians carried out mission in Afghanistan, Siberia, in India and along the Silk Road all the way to China. And about how Islam and Christianity had actually lived together in tolerable peace for almost six hundred years, until the invasion of the Mongols and the ignominious Crusades in the 12th and 13th centuries. Only then did the persecution of Christians begin, probably because the Christians entered into alliances with the Mongols whom they thought would save them from a militant Islam. I am not sure that I convinced my driver, but we did agree that there was a need for more space, historically and conceptually, in our mutual understanding.

A Norwegian Christian artist, Rune Larsen, recently compared the situation with a Simon and Garfunkel song from the Sixties. It was called ‘Sound of Silence’. Rune Larsen translated it into Norwegian in 1966 with the title ‘A cry for silence’. I wonder whether that is what millions of persecuted people today hear: A cry for silence. The sound of silence may be the worst sound in the world when it comes as the answer to a cry for help. Religious and Christian leaders cry for help: ‘You must act on our behalf now; if not, we shall be wiped out. We have moved beyond the phase where it was a matter of equality and rights and protection against persecution of Christians in the Middle East. Now we warn against a situation where the Christian presence in the region has been wiped out.’

June 2015

Copyrighted Material

Knud Jørgensen

On behalf of the editorial committee: Hans Aage Gravaas, Stefanus Alliance International; Tormod Engelsen, MF Norwegian School of Theology; Maqsood Kamil, President of the Presbyterian Seminary, Pakistan; Christof Sauer, International Institute for Religious Freedom, South Africa; and Knud Jørgensen, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series/MF Norwegian School of Theology.



For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

# SECTION ONE

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

# FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF FROM A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

Tore Lindholm

## The Wide Scope of 'Religion or Belief'

The term *religion or belief*, used in international law of human rights after 1945, includes religion, but also non-religious basic conviction and the stance of persons who profess neither a religious conviction nor a non-religious basic conviction.

The point of such an *inclusive reference* is that no human being is excluded from the human rights protection prescribed by what is summarised in the phrase 'the right to religious freedom'. The point is spelt out in the authoritative 1993 'General Comment No. 22' of the United Nations Human Rights Committee, addressing 'The Right to Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion (Article 18)':

(2) Article 18 [of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights] protects theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief.

Similarly, the European Court of Human Rights in its 1993 landmark decision *Kokkinakis v. Greece* states:

(31) As enshrined in Article 9 [of the European Convention on Human Rights], freedom of thought, conscience and religion is one of the foundations of a 'democratic society', within the meaning of the Convention. It is, in its religious dimension, one of the most vital elements that go to make up the identity of believers and their conception of life, but it is also a precious asset for atheists, agnostics, sceptics and the unconcerned.

## Human Rights: Legal but also Moral and Political Entitlements

We may begin delineating the notion of a human right by saying that a human right is a particularly weighty entitlement of each and every human being – whether that entitlement is in fact observed or not observed. Human right norms are codified in international law and in most domestic legal systems. Obviously, human rights are legal entitlements of people and so, at the very least, burden the agencies of a state under whose jurisdiction any person finds themselves with a legal obligation to recognise, protect, and help fulfil their rights. But a human right entitlement is also *moral* as well as *political*, and so burdens other agents (persons and institutions) with a moral duty, respectively a political duty, to recognise the right and, if

feasible and not unreasonable, abstain from such action, or take such action, as is necessary and lawful to counteract violation of the right. We shall return to the intimate connection between legal, moral and political aspects of human rights. But first we need to say something about the universality of human rights.

### **Human Rights: Universal in a Practical Sense, but not in a Metaphysical Sense**

Human rights are *universal* in the sense that no human being is excluded from being entitled to protection. This universal inclusion of holders of human rights sets them apart from earlier legal systems of individual rights that excluded parts of the population from protection (such as the exclusion of all non-Christians and some Christians in Europe from religious freedom under the 1648 Peace of Westphalia; or the exclusion of American Indians and ‘coloured castes’ from political participation in the Spanish Empire under the 1812 Constitution of Cádiz; or the exclusion of Asian and African colonial populations from rights equal to those of British, French and Dutch citizens until well after the end of World War II).<sup>1</sup>

The universality of human rights is *practical* and not metaphysical: their universality does not pertain to *all* human beings or institutions – say, from the very beginning of human history to its ultimate end. The practical universality of human rights means they pertain to *feasible* interpersonal and inter-institutional action and inaction, to acts and omissions by persons and institutions *in our world* – a world in which human rights are as of right acknowledged as normatively binding.

Human rights can be, and are, supported by normative arguments on a diversity of philosophical and cultural grounds, including differing religious and non-religious grounds. Human rights are also criticised or rejected on religious as well as non-religious grounds. Moreover, within most contemporary religious and non-religious normative traditions, the grounds for embrace of human rights are internally contested.

### **The Recent Rise of Human Rights**

The increasing support of human rights voiced by religious and non-religious communities in the seven decades after 1945 is important, but it does not explain the profound and perhaps irreversible acknowledgement of human rights in the contemporary world. Tenacious negotiating efforts by western politicians and diplomats in international bodies have surely made a big difference – but not always to the benefit of human rights.

---

<sup>1</sup> Christian Reus-Smit, *Individual Rights and the Making of the International System* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 2, 193.

To explain the emergence of modern human rights is beyond the scope of this paper. Such an account would include five centuries of efficacious popular struggles for particular individual rights, against imperial powers. Anti-imperial struggles were fought by European Protestants (for their right to religious freedom leading up to the 1648 Peace of Westphalia and some new sovereign territorial states), by Spanish subjects in Latin America (for their right to equal political representation across cultural and racial divides leading to numerous sovereign Latin-American states in the 1820s), and by Asian and African subjects of colonial European empires (for their right to self-determination and fully-fledged human rights leading to 76 new sovereign states between 1945 and 1970).<sup>2</sup>

The new sovereign states in Asia and Africa are not all exemplary models of human rights performance – far from it. But neither was the tenacious and prolonged resistance by major western powers against the independence, the self-determination, and the entitlement to equal human rights of colonial peoples.

The emergence of universal human rights in the decades after 1945 is astounding. The human rights language of international law has by the beginning of the 21st century become globally entrenched and increasingly become a suitable inter-subjective medium for a world-encompassing commitment to globally shared standards of rights protection. The language of international law has become a vehicle of globally shared normative acknowledgement of human rights, a veritable *lingua franca* for basic entitlements of persons and groups, and for the legal, moral, and political obligations on people and governments.

### Religious Freedom before the Rise of Human Rights

Governmental protection and recognition of religious freedom did not begin with human rights. But during most of the known history of human polities religious liberty has been the exception, not the rule. A main pre-modern source of political legitimacy was no doubt a given hegemonic religion. The very idea that political rulers ought to tolerate deities and religious practices of other polities would have appeared irrational in most ancient civilisations.<sup>3</sup> Often, people's adherence to the given hegemonic religion could hardly be told apart from their political loyalty.

In antiquity, religious toleration was nevertheless embarked upon by some rulers in exceptional cases, mainly on prudential political grounds. Toleration arose as a political expedient in the wake of major imperial conquests, pioneered perhaps by the Persian king Cyrus the Great in the sixth century and practised by the Macedonian Alexander the Great in the

<sup>2</sup> Reus-Smit, *Individual Rights*, 7-12.

<sup>3</sup> Malcolm Evans, *Religious Liberty and International Law in Europe* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 6.

fourth century BCE. On similar political grounds, toleration was exercised by the Roman Empire for several centuries. But religious toleration (or indifference) in the Roman Empire was undermined, first by the politically menacing popular upsurge of Christianity, and subsequently by its rise to the status of official imperial religion, towards the end of the fourth century. During the mediæval period, the Roman Church, with prestigious theological arguments<sup>4</sup> and papal authority, called for violent crusades against infidels<sup>5</sup> and for the persecution of heretics.<sup>6</sup>

But principled support of religious freedom, conceived in response to the fact and the perceived legitimacy of religious diversity and disagreement

---

<sup>4</sup> St Augustine's dismal interpretation of Luke 14:23 ('... and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled') was exploited by mainstream Christian churches for fourteen centuries to justify the use of political power against heretics and infidels. See St Augustine, *Treatise Concerning the Correction of the Donatists*, 6/24. Available at:

[www.ccel.org/fathers/NPNF104/augustine/bk\\_correction/correction.html](http://www.ccel.org/fathers/NPNF104/augustine/bk_correction/correction.html) (accessed 21st February 2015). For St Augustine and the Donatists, see Brian Tierney, 'Religious Rights: A Historical Perspective', in N.B. Reynolds and W.C. Durham, Jr. (eds), *Religious Liberty in Western Thought* (Atlanta, GA: Scholar Press for Emory University 1996), 33.

<sup>5</sup> Against infidels: On 25th November 1095, at the Council of Clermont, Pope Urban II summoned the First Crusade... The Pope urged the knights of Europe to stop fighting each other and to make common cause against the enemies of God. The Turks, he cried, are "an accursed race, a race utterly alienated from God, a generation, forsooth, which has neither directed its heart not entrusted its spirit to God". Killing these godless monsters was an holy act: it was a Christian duty to "exterminate this vile race from our lands" (Karen Armstrong, *Holy War. The Crusades and their Impact on Today's World* (New York: Doubleday/Anchor Books, 1992), 3. Armstrong quotes from texts written shortly after the 'success' of the First Crusade.

<sup>6</sup> Against heretics: 'We excommunicate and anathematize every heresy that raises against the holy, orthodox and Catholic faith which we have above explained; condemning all heretics under whatever names they may be known, for while they have different faces they are nevertheless bound to each other by their tails, since in all of them vanity is a common element. Those condemned, being handed over to the secular rulers of their bailiffs, let them be abandoned, to be punished with due justice, clerics being first degraded from their orders. As to the property of the condemned, if they are laymen, let it be confiscated; if clerics, let it be applied to the churches from which they received revenues... Secular authorities, whatever office they may hold, shall be admonished and induced and if necessary compelled by ecclesiastical censure, that as they wish to be esteemed and numbered among the faithful, so for the defense of the faith they ought publicly to take an oath that they will strive in good faith and to the best of their ability to exterminate in the territories subject to their jurisdiction all heretics pointed out by the Church; so that whenever anyone shall have assumed authority, whether spiritual or temporal, let him be bound to confirm this decree by oath.' From Canon 3 of *Decree of the Fourth Lateran Council of the Roman Catholic Church*, 1215. Available at: [www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/latran4.html](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/latran4.html) (accessed 21st February 2015).

within the polity, is not a modern invention. Early Christian theological arguments were advanced by the Church Fathers Justin Martyr and Tertullian.<sup>7</sup> However, their views were not accepted by a politically triumphant Christian church.

The first principled religious arguments for religious freedom carrying political authority were probably grounded in interpretation of Buddhist doctrines. They are due to Indian Emperor Ashoka (302-232 BCE). Ashoka, who was born a Hindu, converted, and became a devoted and learned Buddhist, and had his famous Rock Edicts carved into smooth rock surfaces for general public accessibility in a large number of places in his huge Mauryan Empire, 259-58 BCE. Most significant with respect to religious freedom are *Edict 7* and *Edict 12*.<sup>8</sup> Emperor Ashoka's *Edict 7*, in a translation rendered by the Ven. S. Dhammika, begins (*italics added*):

Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi [this is Emperor Ashoka's self-presentation], *desires that all religions should reside everywhere*, for all of them desire self-control and purity of heart.

Emperor Ashoka's *Edict 12* continues:

But Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, does not value gifts and honors as much as he values this – that *there should be growth in the essentials of all religions*. Growth in essentials can be done in different ways, but all of them have as their root restraint in speech, that is, not praising one's own religion, or condemning the religion of others without good cause. And if there is cause for criticism, it should be done in a mild way. But it is better to honour other religions for this reason. By so doing, one's own religion benefits, and so do other religions, while doing otherwise harms one's own religion and the religions of others. Whoever praises his own religion, due to excessive devotion, and condemns others with the thought, 'Let me glorify my own religion', only harms his own religion. Therefore contact [between religions] is good. One should listen to and respect the doctrines professed by others. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, desires that all should be well learned in the good doctrines of other religions.<sup>9</sup>

We have reason to believe that Emperor Ashoka was, for some decades, reasonably successful in implementing his edicts on religious freedom.<sup>10</sup> But neither on the Indian subcontinent nor in other civilisational traditions have the bulk of people enjoyed stable and reliable protection of religious freedom during the 24 centuries that have passed between Ashoka's reign and the 21st century. On the contrary, religious liberty has until recently been more the exception than the rule. But there is no denying that different

<sup>7</sup> E. Gregory Wallace, 'Justifying Religious Freedom: The Western Tradition', 114 Penn St. L. Rev. 2009-2010: 485-570, at 501-504.

<sup>8</sup> [www.cs.colostate.edu/~malaiya/ashoka.html#FOURTEEN](http://www.cs.colostate.edu/~malaiya/ashoka.html#FOURTEEN) – for a recent study of Emperor Ashoka and his Rock Edicts, see Charles Allen, *Ashoka: The Search for India's Lost Emperor* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2012), 210, 212-13, 384-85.

<sup>9</sup> [www.cs.colostate.edu/~malaiya/ashoka.html](http://www.cs.colostate.edu/~malaiya/ashoka.html)

<sup>10</sup> Allen, *Ashoka: The Search*.



epochs, cultures, regimes, and political constellations have exhibited a vast variety, and sometimes sudden shifts, in the fortunes of religious liberty.

We now leap from the early history of religious freedom to contemporary norms and systems for protection of the human right to freedom of religion or belief, and to the practice and diffusion of, and constraints on, religious freedom of religion or belief in the contemporary world.

### **The Normative Core of the Human Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief**

What constitutes the normative core of the human right to freedom of religion or belief?<sup>11</sup> The issues involved arise in a host of different historical and cultural contexts, and institutional arrangements in any particular society will inevitably vary in many ways. But there are certain core values that will be protected and features that a regime will exhibit if freedom of religion or belief is respected. These constitute a set of *minimum standards*. Many systems go further in supporting genuine cultures of inter- and intra-religious toleration and mutual respect.

The human right to freedom of religion or belief, *as codified in international human rights instruments*, applies to every human being everywhere in the world, without exception. Human beings are the primary holders and beneficiaries of this right to freedom. States – ideally under continual critical scrutiny by informed citizens in each country, and monitored and assisted by international organs, foreign governments, and transnational human rights networks – are the primary addressees burdened with the correlative obligations. This goes for the legal obligations and political duties of governments, but obliquely involves also moral duties of persons and institutions not in governmental positions.

The classical modern statement of the human right to freedom of religion or belief is Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted as part of a resolution by the General Assembly of the United Nations 10th December 1948:<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> The English term ‘belief’ should, as already indicated, not be taken to include solely religious belief. Not excluded from protection is the freedom of non-religious convictions, such as scepticism and atheist doctrines; neither is indifference to questions of religion and worldview excluded from protection. This inclusive scope is more clearly indicated by the Russian term убеждения, used in the initial Soviet proposal of 1947-48 in the UN Commission on Human Rights and then translated as ‘belief’ in the English version of what became Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The corresponding French translation is ‘conviction’ and the Russian term is, still, убеждения.

<sup>12</sup> Mary Ann Glendon, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: Random House, 2001), 163-71. For the contributions of religious activism in establishing human rights in international law,

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Beyond the religious freedom provision in Article 18 of UDHR, elaborated in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966/1976), key amplifications and specifications of the human right to freedom of religion or belief are provided by, inter alia, the 1981 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. The United Nations Human Rights Committee General Comment No. 22 (48) provides normative substance to Article 18 of the ICCPR. Relevant regional sources are the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) in particular Article 9 supplemented by Protocol No. 1, Article 2, the American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR), in particular Article 12, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), in particular Article 8. The normative core of the human right to freedom of religion or belief as delineated in the above-mentioned international human rights instruments may be condensed to eight components:<sup>13</sup>

1. *Internal freedom*: Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom for all to have, adopt, maintain or change religion or belief.
2. *External freedom*: Everyone has the freedom, either alone or in community with others, in public or private, to manifest his or her religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.
3. *Non-coercion*: No-one shall be subject to coercion that would impair his or her freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his or her choice.
4. *Non-discrimination*: States are obliged to respect and to ensure, for all individuals within their territory and subject to their jurisdiction, the right to freedom of religion or belief without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion or belief, political

---

see John S. Nurser, *For All Peoples and All Nations: The Ecumenical Church and Human Rights* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> The following eight-point list is, with small modifications, lifted from Tore Lindholm, Cole Durham Jr. and Bahia Tahzib-Lie (eds), *Facilitating Freedom of Religion or Belief: A Deskbook* (Leiden: Marinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2004), xxxvii-ix. References to particular provisions in human rights instruments and a modicum of commentaries are also provided there. An overview of the European Court of Human Rights' case law on freedom of religion prepared by the Court's Research Division is available at: [www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Research\\_report\\_religion\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Research_report_religion_ENG.pdf) – while a Digest of Reports by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief is available at: [www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/RapporteursDigestFreedomReligionBelief.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/RapporteursDigestFreedomReligionBelief.pdf)

or other opinion, national or other origin, property, birth or other status.

5. *Rights of parents and guardians:* States are obliged to respect the liberty of parents, and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions, subject to providing protection for the rights of each child to freedom of religion or belief consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.
6. *Corporate freedom and legal status:* Religious communities themselves have freedom of religion or belief, including a right to autonomy in their own affairs. An aspect of this corporate aspect of freedom of religion or belief is for religious communities to have standing and institutional rights to assert their rights and interests as communities. Religious communities may not wish to avail themselves of formal legal entity status, but they have a right to acquire legal entity status as part of their right to freedom of religion or belief and in particular as an aspect of the freedom to manifest religious beliefs not only individually, but in community with others.
7. *Limits of permissible restrictions on external freedom:* Freedom to manifest one's religion or belief may be subject to restrictions but only if such restrictions
  - (a) are prescribed by law, and
  - (b) are applied by the state for the purpose of protecting (i) public safety, (ii) order, (iii) health, (iv) morals, or (v) the fundamental rights of others, and
  - (c) are necessary – that is, are proportionate and not excessive – in order to achieve the purpose aimed at by the state when applying the restriction, and only for the purpose of protecting one or more of (i) to (v) in (b) above.

8. *Non-derogability:* States may make no derogation from the right to freedom of religion or belief, not even in times of public emergency.

Obviously, the human right to freedom of religion or belief, in spite of its inclusive reference – protecting people of religion as well as people with non-religious convictions and people who are religiously indifferent – is nevertheless articulated so as to fit traditional paradigms of religious organisation and practice. So, we might perhaps wonder how an atheist conviction can be manifested in 'worship', or wonder how a religiously indifferent person may 'observe' his or her belief. Here we leave aside such objections to the tradition-based language used in spelling out the human right to freedom of religion or belief.

The presentation above, in eight points, of the normative core of the human right to freedom of religion or belief is an attempt to synthesise the doctrine laid down in international human rights instruments. It may appear coherent, precise, and reasonably specific. And surely, many questions and

uncertainties about the human right to freedom of religion or belief may, one may hope, be resolved by reference to such a condensed summary?

But numerous legal dilemmas and disagreements remain that are not dissolved by our eight-point sketch of the normative core of the human right to freedom of religion or belief. The practice of international and domestic tribunals adjudicating freedom of religion or belief cases, based on international human rights norms for protection of freedom of religion or belief, demonstrates that there is plenty of room for legal disagreement and uncertainty, also among experts, about the best understanding and correct application of the human right to freedom of religion or belief. Moreover, particular cases are always situated in unique contexts and often involve rights other than religious freedom rights (such as human rights addressing degrading treatment, retroactivity, privacy, freedom of expression, non-discrimination, or freedom of assembly and association, and so on). And, of course, there is much more to justice than human rights. Also, not least in importance, the proper selection, understanding and assessment of facts relevant to a case are always open to reasonable questioning and potential controversy.

The only way to illustrate the points just made is to visit, however cursorily, some important decisions of authoritative human rights organs addressing freedom of religion or belief cases. Not unexpectedly, we shall discover that 'the devil is in the detail' and there is no short-cut to unambiguously predictable legal outcomes, no procedure that avoids the shadow of uncertainty inherent in professional agreements or that shelters even judges from the occasional effects of ideological, cultural or political predispositions.

### **Landmark International Law Decisions on Freedom of Religion or Belief Cases**

Legal cases below are available on the internet by case names (in *italics*). Items in the eight-point list of religious freedom norms are indicated by their numbers (in brackets).

*Kokkinakis v. Greece* (ECtHR 14307/88, 25th May 1993): This landmark case was the first to be decided by the European Court of Human Rights involving a claim that a state had violated its obligations to protect religious freedom under Article 9 of the Convention. It addresses the compatibility of legal sanctions against *proselytism* with the human right of persons to manifest their religion (see (2)) through *missionary activity*. The Court held that Article 9 of ECHR included the right of individuals and religious groups to spread their doctrine and gain new followers through proselytism, provided that they do not use abusive, fraudulent or violent means. A Greek law prohibiting proselytism was found legitimate but only as applied to 'improper proselytism'. After a careful scrutiny of the facts of the case, the court concluded that the Greek government had not supplied

sufficient evidence to prove that Mr Kokkinakis, who had merely engaged in door-to-door evangelism, had engaged in *improper proselytism*. The conviction of Mr Kokkinakis had therefore infringed his right under ECHR to manifest his religion (2). The court found that the government's intervention against him was proscribed by law (7a) and that the law did pursue a legitimate aim: 'to ensure the peaceful enjoyment of the personal freedoms of all those living on its territory' (7b). But intervention against him was not 'necessary in a democratic society' to achieve the purpose aimed at (7c).<sup>14</sup> So, the court vindicated Mr Kokkinakis, and instructed the Greek government to pay him non-pecuniary damage and cover his legal expenses.

*Larissis and Others v. Greece* (ECtHR 140/1996/759/958–960 24th February 1998) was a case of three air force officers complaining about being convicted by Greek courts for *proselytism*. They had tried to convert others, including three of their air-force subordinates, to their Pentecostal faith. Here the court concluded that their conviction was no violation of the three officers' right to manifest their religion (2) since they had overstepped the threshold into *improper proselytism*, thus making it necessary for the state to protect junior airmen from being put under undue pressure by their superiors.

*Leyla Şahin v. Turkey* (ECtHR Fourth Chamber 29th June 2004/ Grand Chamber 10th November 2005) was the case of a medical student and a practising Muslim at Istanbul University who in 1998, based on a university regulation, was denied access to classes for wearing a headscarf in accord with her religious conviction.

Şahin lost before the European Court of Human Rights in her first application in June 2004 and again in her appeal to the court's Grand Chamber in November 2005. In both cases the court accepted that her conduct was religiously motivated. Even so, there has been no breach of her right to manifest her religion since the interference against her was proscribed by law (7a), was in pursuit of a legitimate aim including 'the protection of the 'rights and freedoms of others' and the 'maintenance of public order'' (7b), and was justified in principle by 'meeting a pressing social need' and was 'proportionate to the aim pursued' (7c). The Grand Chamber judgement includes a well-argued dissenting vote in favour of Şahin.

*Raihon Hudoyberganova v. Uzbekistan* (HRC 931/20005 November 2004) is a case similar to *Şahin*. It was dealt with by the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations (HRC), in between the two ECtHR decisions on *Şahin*. In her communication to HRC, Hudoyberganova complained about being expelled from studying at the Farsi Department at Tashkent Institute for Eastern Languages for wearing Muslim *hijab*. In

<sup>14</sup> *Kokkinakis v. Greece* is analysed in Lindholm, *Facilitating Freedom of Religion* (see the Index).

other respects, her case is very similar to that of *Şahin*. HRC found that Hudoyberganova had been deprived not only of her human right to manifest her religion (ICCPR 18.3; see (2)) but her right ‘not to be subjected to coercion’... ‘that would impair the individual’s freedom to have or adopt a religion’ (ICCPR 18.2; see (3)).

*Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia and Others v. Moldova* (HcTtHR 45701/99, 13th December 2001) concerned the Moldovan authorities’ refusal to recognise the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia, an Orthodox Christian church, on the ground that it had split from the Metropolitan Church of Moldova, which was recognised by the State. The applicant alleged that, under Moldavian legislation, an unrecognised church could not operate, its priest could not take divine service, its members could not meet to practise their religion, nor could it have legal personality and judicial protection of its assets (see (6)). The court found that, by its denial of recognition, the government had failed in its duty of neutrality and impartiality between rival religious denominations, had interfered with the applicants’ freedom of religion (see (2)), with consequences not proportionate to the legitimate aim of protecting ‘public order and public safety’ (see 7c)) and therefore, had constituted a violation of the applicants’ freedom of religion.

*Obst v. Germany* (ECtHR 425/03, 23rd September 2010) and *Schüth v. Germany* (ECtHR 1620/03, 23rd September 2010) are two separate cases of church employees dismissed for adultery by reference to their respective churches’ corporate freedom (6). The two cases were decided by the court on the same day, with opposite outcomes. Both applicants had exhausted domestic legal remedies and complained of the refusal of German courts to overturn their dismissal, relying on ECHR Article 8.1: ‘Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.’ Obst, raised in a Mormon family, had from 1986 been public relations director of the Mormon Church for Europe. Married in 1980 under Mormon rites, in December 1993 he confided to his pastor that he had an affair with another woman. Following the pastor’s advice, he confided to his superior who informed him of his dismissal without notice a few days later. Obst was subsequently excommunicated. Schüth had from the mid-1980s been organist and choirmaster in the Catholic parish of St Lambert, Essen. Separated from his wife in 1994, from 1995 he had lived with his new partner with whom in 1997 he expected a baby. After confiding to his parish dean, in July 1997 he was informed that he was dismissed as of April 1998 for having violated the employment regulations of the Catholic Church by committing adultery and being guilty of bigamy. Not overturning the dismissal of Obst was by the court held not to violate his human right to respect for ‘his private and family life’. Not overturning Schüth’s dismissal was held to violate his identical human rights.

Why this difference? The court found the injury suffered by Obst to be limited due to his relatively young age and that, when signing the

employment contract, he should have been aware of the importance of marital fidelity for the Mormon Church and of the incompatibility of his extra-marital relationship when becoming the church's public relations director for Europe. The Court found Schüth's chances of finding a new job outside the Catholic Church difficult or even impossible, given his special qualifications. Also, he had not challenged the position of the church and, although his contractual duty of loyalty to the church limited his right to respect for his private life to a degree, it could not be interpreted as an unequivocal undertaking to live a life of abstinence in the event of separation or divorce. In the case of Schüth, German labour courts had, according to the ECtHR, failed to weigh his rights against those of the religious employer in a manner compatible with the ECHR. The two contrary decisions reached by the ECtHR, both unanimous, were weighed against the religious freedom right of the respective churches (6); there had been no violation of ECHR Article 8 in the case of Obst; there had been a violation of ECHR Article 8 in the case of Schüth.

In order to illustrate general points, many additional decisions by international human rights tribunals and organs in cases of freedom of religion or belief could of course be cited, and preferably in much greater detail. But some general points about the practice of human rights law can now be made:

- Adjudicating cases involving freedom of religion or belief may implicate other human rights and matters of justice beyond human rights; that human rights are 'trumps' does not release human rights practitioners from due consideration of principles and values that may conflict with a given human right.
- Tribunals must normally weigh against one another matters that are not readily, or only with difficulty, commensurable.
- Even experts and professionals cannot elude the occasional effects of their ideological, cultural or political predispositions.
- Outcomes of particular cases before authoritative human rights courts and committees – also when announced as 'final' – are fallible, criticisable, and in principle revisable by better arguments and facts better understood later on (even when a given case is finally closed).

Copyrighted Material

### **So What is the Perspective of Human Rights on Freedom of Religion or Belief?**

The recently emerging field of human rights is that of a novel, complex and unique global practice. The practice includes interconnected professional and non-professional pursuits, scholarly, journalistic, educational, and media work, ethical beliefs and attitudes, social action and activism, domestic and international politics, and – as the heart of the matter – international human rights law. But, as stated by human rights scholar



James Nickel, ‘even if international human rights law is the heart of human rights, there are other essential organs that must be monitored to assess the health of human rights.’<sup>15</sup>

Instead of conceiving of human rights as an emerging complex and normative practice, whose heart is developing, dynamic, and at times ground-breaking, international human rights law, we might of course think of human rights as the implication of some higher-level idea – say, that human rights are entitlements that belong to people ‘by nature’, or ‘solely in virtue of their humanity’. Or, alternatively, we might think of human rights as objects of straightforward agreement among diverse philosophical, religious and ideological cultures. Both approaches were, I think wisely, disowned by the founding mothers and fathers in 1947-48. They realised that no single deep philosophical or theological principle could ground what was about to emerge as international human rights norms. They therefore aspired to a practical doctrine ‘that could be endorsed from many contemporary moral, religious and cultural points of view, and that was suited to be implemented by means distinctive to characteristically modern forms of social organisation’.<sup>16</sup>

This practical, and deliberately non-fundamentalist, approach is crucial:<sup>17</sup> the global practice of human rights is grounded in negotiated, fallible, revisable, but in fact widely accepted international human rights law. To the extent that human rights are successfully institutionalised, they become collectively shared normative expectations: we can take human rights for granted in the sense that we know, not just that they are generally shared, but that their being shared is shared.<sup>18</sup>

This is not the place to analyse the philosophical or religious grounds of human rights. But we should note that international human rights law ‘serve to limit state sovereignty, even within the state’s own jurisdiction, for the sake of individuals themselves’.<sup>19</sup> A commitment to the equal dignity of every human being is inseparable from the practice of human rights. This commitment is solemnly proclaimed in all international human rights instruments adopted after 1945, as exemplified in the identical Preambles to the two United Nations International Human Rights Covenants of 1966-76 (emphasis modified):

The State Parties to the present Covenant

Copyrighted Material

...

<sup>15</sup> James Nickel, ‘What Future for Human Rights?’ in *Ethics and International Affairs*, 28/2, 2014: 213-23, at 215.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Beitz, *The Idea of Human Rights* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 8.

<sup>17</sup> Jacques Maritain, ‘Introduction’, in *Human Rights, Comments and Interpretations* (Paris: UNESCO/PHS/3 (rev.)), 25th July 1948.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Risse and Kathryn Sikkink, ‘The socialization of human rights norms’, in Risse, Ropp and Sikkink (eds), *The Power of Human Rights* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), 7.

<sup>19</sup> Alan Buchanan, *The Heart of Human Rights* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 23.



Recognizing that the [equal and inalienable right of all members of the human family] *derive from the inherent dignity of the human person*

...

Agree upon the following Articles...

Alas! the notion of human dignity is not entirely clear. Before the end of World War II, this originally Stoic notion<sup>20</sup> had never been elevated to the status of an (admittedly thin) foundational doctrine in international law, until it was included in the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations in midsummer 1945. The proposition that human rights ‘derive from the inherent dignity of the human person’ is hardly a piece of meticulous philosophical or theological reasoning. Rather, it indicates the crucial *ecumenical significance* of the globally entrenched commitment to equal human dignity. The one job the notion of human dignity does well for international human rights law is to affirm the inalienable, equal, entitlement of all human beings to enjoy and exercise their human rights, as provided for by international law.

When conflicts of interpretation and application arise, as they often do, about what these rights amount to in particular cases, recourse to specific international human rights law and jurisprudence remains the universally accessible, authoritative-but-fallible version of a global normative *lingua franca*, not only for legal purposes but also for political and moral purposes. Human rights activists and human rights defenders of all stripes, as well as governments, involved in struggles about human rights and their proper application tend to have recourse to and argue about interpretations of international human rights law – and not about more esoteric philosophical or theological matters. The point here is not that a human right in good standing must also be a moral right *in good philosophical standing* – or must also be, say, a Christian right *as justified by some deep (but essentially contestable) theological source*. Nor is the point that a human right in good standing must follow seamlessly from some already adopted political doctrine. The point is that a human right in good legal standing has political weight and moral weight by virtue of our shared prior commitment to abide by globally institutionalised human rights law.

Copyrighted Material

### Freedom of Religion or Belief in the Contemporary World

Human rights are not a religion or a fully-fledged *Weltanschauung*. They are globally acknowledged minimum standards, claims to a minimally decent or dignified human life for all: to having a life, leading one’s own life, being safe against severely cruel or degrading treatment, and against

<sup>20</sup> Hubert Cancik, “Dignity of Man” and “Persona” in Stoic Anthropology: Some Remarks on Cicero, *De officiis* I 105-107’, in David Kretzmer and Eckart Klein (eds), *The Concept of Human Dignity in Human Rights Discourse* (The Hague/London/New York: Kluwer Law International, 2002), 19-39.

severely unfair treatment.<sup>21</sup> This is an inspiring and abstract aspiration, yet pedestrian and not very controversial.

Human rights norms are of great consequence, though they are not very profound. One may be ready to die in order to defend people's human rights, but one cannot live and lead a human life out of nothing but a commitment to human rights.

One peculiarity of the human right to freedom of religion or belief is that, among all human rights norms, this freedom opens the gate to a reflective equilibrium in support of universal human rights. If a Christian or Muslim or atheist is entitled to practise their religion or their life stance freely because they are protected by universal human rights, they may thereby be motivated to seek out in their own religion or life stance proper grounds for embracing human rights protection for all, including for those whose religion or life stance they may even detest. Such discourses are already in process within and across religious and philosophical divides about equal human dignity as a ground for embracing universal human rights.

According to the last report by PEW,<sup>22</sup> social hostilities involving religion are disturbingly high and so are state restrictions on religious practices in many countries. And religious leaders, human rights scholars and NGOs worldwide are concerned with the corresponding low levels of government protection and social respect for freedom of religion or belief.

Monitoring of freedom of religion or belief worldwide is now extensive. A recent case is the publication in January 2015 of a thoroughly researched 563 pages empirical report<sup>23</sup> on protection of freedom of religion or belief in each of the ten member-states of ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations). The report takes its point of departure in the soft law-natured 2012 ASEAN Declaration of Human Rights. But the normative basis for reporting facts on the ground lies squarely on the strict standards spelled out in international human rights law, the standards reported and discussed in this chapter.

Among many valuable FORB monitoring services are *Human Rights without Frontiers International*, *Forum 18 News Service*, and the US State Department's annual report on religious freedom.<sup>24</sup> Predominantly, the standards for reporting compliance with or violation of the human right to freedom of religion or belief are as presented in this chapter.

---

<sup>21</sup> James W. Nickel, *Making Sense of Human Rights. Second Edition* (Malden, MA: Blackwells 2007), 62.

<sup>22</sup> [www.pewforum.org/files/2015/02/Restrictions2015\\_fullReport.pdf](http://www.pewforum.org/files/2015/02/Restrictions2015_fullReport.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Human Rights Resource Centre, *Keeping the Faith: A Study of Freedom of Thought, Conscience, and Religion in ASEAN*, Jakarta, January 2015.

<sup>24</sup> [www.hrwf.net](http://www.hrwf.net), [www.forum18.org](http://www.forum18.org), [www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf](http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf)

# FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Thomas Schirrmacher and Richard Howell

## History of the Freedom of Religion

### *The Birth of the Idea of Religious Freedom*

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 17th century in the radical wing of Protestantism. Michael Farris has conducted a comprehensive study regarding the early sources of religious freedom in the USA, which include countless sermons and tracts.<sup>1</sup> He traces all the early initiatives back to England.

After Sebastian Castellio, who was previously a student of John Calvin and who in 1554 argued against Calvin for a rather rudimentary form of religious freedom (whereby there continued to be punishment for the 'Godless' – that is, atheists), the first known tract that called for complete religious freedom appeared in 1614 and was produced by the English Baptist Leonard Busher.<sup>2</sup> The idea spread among Baptists and other 'dissenters' in England, the Netherlands, and then in the USA. It was the Baptist and spiritualist Roger Williams (1604-85), who in 1639 was a co-founder of the first American Baptist community with a congregational structure, who in 1644 called for complete religious freedom,<sup>3</sup> and achieved religious freedom and the first Constitution with complete separation of church and state in Rhode Island in 1647. Rainer Prätorius nails it on the head when he says: '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 Protestant theologian and philosopher of religion Ernst Troeltsch<sup>5</sup> has supported the view that human rights and religious freedom is not due

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael Farris, *From Tyndale to Madison* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Leonard Busher, *Religious Peace* (Amsterdam 1614, London: Sweeting, 1644).

<sup>3</sup> Roger Williams, *The Bloody Tenent, for Cause of Conscience* (London 1644); Roger Williams, *Christenings make not Christians* (London, 1645).

<sup>4</sup> Rainer Prätorius, *In God We Trust: Religion und Politik in den USA* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2003), 35.

<sup>5</sup> Cf Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, 'Puritanische Sektenfreiheit versus lutherische Volkskirche', in *Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologieggeschichte*, Vol. 9 (2002) 1, 42-69.

to the Protestantism of established churches, but rather that it is due to free churches, sects, and spiritualists, who developed their views in Europe, but were often driven to the New World. They range from the Puritans to the Quakers. 'It is at this point that the stepchildren of the Reformation finally had their hour in world history.'<sup>6</sup>

The hour of birth of religious freedom – if we may exaggerate in our formulation – is the struggle for freedom by Christian minority churches against Christian majority churches, and in many non-Christian countries it is religious minority movements over against majority religions. This also explains, in our judgement, the ambivalence of historic Christianity over against democratic developments.

What was readily overlooked, perhaps because the large churches were the primary writers of church history, was the following: the anti-clerical Enlightenment of the French Revolution and the American Revolution, which was shaped by very pious and deistic individuals, and which had a great impact on European developments, have a deep commonality which at first glance one would not suppose is there. Both of them were directed against the ruling large churches.

### *Two Ways towards Religious Freedom – Anti-Religious and Religious*

Religious liberty, which was unknown during most of the world's history, has come at great cost and through a painful course of events in the western world. A first step in the direction of religious liberty was the 1526 resolution of the Reichstag in Speyer. The resolution officially tolerated two (Christian) religions (Catholic and Protestant, meaning Lutheran) for the first time. The 1555 Peace of Augsburg expanded toleration, and gradually this included a third Christian confession, that of the Calvinist or Reformed churches. However, religious wars ensued in Central Europe as well as within France, England and Holland. After suffering untold numbers of victims, Europe returned to the Peace of Augsburg via the Peace of Westphalia. One hundred years had been wasted.

Nonetheless, Europe had had enough of religiously motivated or religiously veiled wars. Additionally, the religion-state system and demographic migrations accounted for the fact that more and more people lived in the 'wrong' regions, meaning regions where a religion other than their own was that of the state. Prussians first extended religious liberty beyond the Christian confessions mentioned in the Peace of Westphalia to include Arminians and others. Key steps were seen in the Patent of Tolerance conferred by Joseph II in Austria in 1781. It gave Jews the first set of liberties, and the Prussian Land Law of 1794 extended rights. Gradually, Jews were the first adherents of a non-Christian religion to be

---

<sup>6</sup> Ernst Troeltsch, *Die Bedeutung des Protestantismus für die Entstehung der modernen Welt* (Munich/Berlin: R. Oldenbourg, 1911), 62.

included. Still, general religious liberty in Germany, for example, has only been in place since 1919 under the Weimar Constitution, and truly comprehensive religious freedom has only been practised since the acceptance of the 1949 Constitution.

Thus two central constitutional documents from 1789, one in France and the other in the United States of America, provided the anchor for religious liberty that illuminates an antithesis to the prior history of religious liberty. The modern concept of religious liberty, which we have seen developing in the Christian world over the last 250 years, has been achieved along two completely different paths of struggle. Both paths led to the separation of church and state, but they were pursued very differently, as is shown in present-day secular France and in the religiously friendly Great Britain, Holland and Switzerland, and as a late comer, Germany.

While in the USA it was Christian theologians and politicians who demanded religious liberty and brought it to pass, the Catholic Church in Europe – influenced by the clash with increasingly secularised European states – did not even recognise religious liberty as part of the Christian faith until the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).

At the time when the Evangelical Alliance was founded in London in the middle of the nineteenth century, it was in favour of religious liberty and gained a lot of opposition from mainline and state churches because of this.<sup>7</sup> Numerous national alliances grew out of a desire for religious liberty. At an early stage, the topic of religious liberty was on the agenda at each major conference. An appearance was made before the Russian Czar and the Turkish Sultan in an effort to support Orthodox Christians.

### *Confessional Political Ethics and Democratisation*<sup>8</sup>

In 1993 Samuel P. Huntington put forth the famous and widely received thesis of four waves to democracy, which for him include the rule of human rights and the establishing of a separation of church and state with religious

---

<sup>7</sup> Gerhard Lindemann, *Die Geschichte der Evangelischen Allianz im Zeitalter des Liberalismus (1846-1879)*, (Theologie: Forschung und Wissenschaft Bd. 24 [English title translation: The History of the Evangelical Alliance in the Age of Liberalism (1846-1879). Theology: Research and Scholarship Vol. 24], Münster: LIT, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> See Thomas Schirmacher, 'Democracy and Christian Ethics', in Nelu Burcea and Thomas Schirmacher (eds), *Jurnalul Libertatii de Constiinta* (Bukarest: Editura Universitara, 2013. ISBN 978-606-591-728-6), 568-80; 'Christianity and Democracy', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 35 (2011) 1, 51-60; Thomas Schirmacher, 'Demokratie und christliche Ethik', in *Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (Supplement to *Das Parlament*) 14/2009 (30th March, 2009), 21-26, also available at: [www.bpb.de/publikationen/N6VK9L,0,Demokratie\\_und\\_christliche\\_Ethik.html](http://www.bpb.de/publikationen/N6VK9L,0,Demokratie_und_christliche_Ethik.html).

freedom.<sup>9</sup> In addition to sociological and economic factors, he recognises a striking accumulation of religious majority religions or denominations. According to him – and we reproduce it here in simplified form – in the first wave from 1828 to 1926 above all Protestant, in the second from 1943 to 1962 primarily Protestant, Catholic and Far Eastern, in the third wave from 1974 to 1988 especially Catholic and Orthodox countries became democratic, and in the fourth wave, after 1989-90, all the religions just named were again involved. At the end of all of this, out of 88 free democracies, 79, or more than 90%, are majority Christian. In addition, there is one Jewish democracy and seven democracies which have Far Eastern religions in the majority, whereby in Mauritius and South Korea Christians make up a second, large segment of the population. Mali is the only really free, democratic country that has a majority Muslim population.<sup>10</sup>

Is it by chance that a correlation between religious orientation and the ability to democratise repeatedly were seen after the breakdown of Soviet imperialism? Is it by chance that the secular Protestant and Catholic countries which had earlier been a part of the sphere of influence of Soviet Communism rather quickly became functioning democratic states, that Orthodox countries only became so in part (the democracies in, for instance, Russia, Georgia, Montenegro and Macedonia remained incomplete), and that none of the Muslim countries followed suit?

Not only did Huntington show that there were certain waves of countries becoming democracies, in which a major Christian confession was involved. John Witte showed that, as a rule, each of those waves has been preceded by the theology of the same confession moving towards endorsing democracy including religious freedom in their political ethics.<sup>11</sup>

Is it really only by chance that the Catholic Church's turn towards freedom of religion, etc. in the Second Vatican Council and around the world preceded the third wave of democratisation which embraced many Catholic countries from 1974 to 1990 in Europe and Latin America? I do not want to establish a unilinear dependency, but at the same time the thought that the theological teachings of the largest religious organisation in the world has no influence on the actual politics of their followers is not seriously advocated by any scholar.

Since it was most difficult for Orthodox theology to accept a post-Enlightenment set of political ethics, it comes as no surprise that among the

<sup>9</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); comp. Samuel P. Huntington, *Religion und die dritte Welt*, 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>10</sup> Classification according to [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org), cf for quality M. Schmidt (annotation 11), 381-86, 392-98 and further studies, 417, 422.

<sup>11</sup> John Witte (ed), *Christianity and Democracy in Global Context* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993).

Christian countries it is above all the Orthodox countries that have the most difficulty with religious freedom, especially for minority churches and religions. Although in the meantime all countries elect their governments, several however exhibit substantial defects, such as limited religious freedom as in Greece or outside the EU in autocracy as seen in Russia. At the same time, the recognisable steps towards reform in theological terms and in political ethics within Orthodox churches, extending to human rights and democratic forms of government,<sup>12</sup> give reason for hope that democracy in Orthodox countries will become stronger and freer.

## Christian Arguments for Religious Freedom

### *A Christian Argument in a Nutshell*

Out of this history, and especially since the Reformation, several core arguments for religious freedom have become crystallised in the Christian tradition and are now widely recognised. We are not discussing here how long it took the different branches to reach those conclusions, but try to summarise the typical arguments for religious freedom used *today*.

Religious freedom for Christian churches is not only a *political* guideline for Christians. Rather, it arises from the Christian faith itself and is part of its nature on every level, in private, in the church, in everyday public life, in society at large and in politics.

This is due to the fact that, according to Christians, God has created all people as his image-bearers (Gen. 1:26-27, 5:1). This does not apply only to Christians, but to all those created by God, for which reason everyone has the same human dignity and human rights which derive from the image-bearing nature all people possess. Thus, if religious freedom is part of Christian teaching, it applies not only to a certain group of Christians, or to all Christians, but to all humans, no matter what they believe or do not believe.

This starts with the nature of the relationship to God, called 'faith' in the Bible and Christianity. God desires – as is repeatedly stated in the Old and New Testaments – to be wholeheartedly loved, not worshipped as a result

Copyrighted Material

<sup>12</sup> Cf for the Greek Orthodox Church Konstantin Delikostantis, 'Die Menschenrechte im Kontext der orthodoxen Theologie', in *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 and Lars Peter Schmidt (eds), *Beginn einer neuen Ära?* (Moscow/Bonn: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2004); Rudolf Uertz/Lars Peter Schmidt, *Die Grundlagen der Lehre der Russischen Orthodoxen Kirche über die Würde, die Freiheit und die Menschenrechte* (Moscow: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2008).



of coercion. The innermost orientation of the conscience and heart of individuals may not and cannot be compelled.

Is a forced conversion a conversion? All Christian confessions agree that a conversion has to be deeply personal, ultimately a considered move of the heart. A forced conversion is not something we want and not something we can accept. A forced conversion is no conversion at all because it does not create faith and trust in God, but just blind obedience to outward things.

Because faith in God cannot be forced, God also prohibited Christians from executing any type of penalty against its critics and from punishing people for their 'unbelief'. Even Jonah had to experience that God was more merciful than Jonah himself, who would have preferred to see judgement come over Nineveh (Jon. 4:1-10). And it was Jesus who rejected the thinking of his disciples to call fire down from heaven upon the villages which did not welcome them (Luke 9:51-56). That said, Christians throughout all time have been refused the right to punish other people for rejecting Jesus or the Gospel (or any of our convictions).

But if Christians or the church may not punish people, if they believe otherwise, what about the state? The state, with its monopoly on the use of force, has the mandate to protect human rights, including the right to freedom of religion, and not to promote the Christian faith or another faith. Whoever looks at which tasks the New Testament assigns to the state sees that the expansion or promotion of a certain religion is *not* included among them. However, peace and justice *for all* are included. Christians are subject to the state in matters relating to worldly justice. Indeed, Paul is able to straightforwardly describe the non-Christian state as 'God's servants' if they punish Christians who do evil (Rom. 13:1-7). That Christians in so-called 'Christian' nations have acted differently in the course of history does not change anything about the fact that a Christian does not have to twist his faith if he advocates religious freedom. Rather, this is something which arises naturally from his or her faith.

The state has to protect Christians insofar as it has to protect everyone who does good, and in its efforts to promote justice and peace it has to restrain all those who plan or carry out violent acts, regardless of whether they are religiously motivated or not. Christians call for no more of a right to religious freedom for themselves than for others. The killing of a Muslim or a Baha'i for the sake of his or her faith is as terrible as the killing of a Christian. Christians want to 'live at peace with everyone' (Rom. 12:18), not only with people like themselves.

What arises naturally is an automatic separation of church and state. When Jesus said: 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's,' he knew that the Roman emperor was not a Christian (Mt 22:21). He automatically transferred the loyalty of the Jews towards their state to loyalty towards a non-Jewish state. The separation of church and state actually presupposes a religion which wants this, and former Christian,



western countries can be happy that the majority religion advocates this separation and does not fight against it.

The state has to guarantee peace and justice for all its citizens, no matter what they believe. Christian justice is not a justice that bestows privileges on Christians, but Christian justice is human justice for all humans alike. The state has to assure, and the religious citizens have to help the state in this, that the 'competition' between religions and non-religious worldviews, and the 'competition' of different branches within a religion, is not carried out by violence or the pressure of bribery but is left to peaceful intellectual discussion among mature people. Such peace between religions of all kinds produces – as research shows – in return a more peaceful and prosperous society, while suppression of religious freedom produces violent religious movements of all kinds and bans religious minorities from economic participation, education and science with devastating results for every society.

### *Religious Freedom and the Truth Question*

At no time in human history has there been a country in the world which has produced peace between religions so that these religions have come to agreement on their differences, have united with each other, or have dispensed with every claim to truth. Normally it has been, and is, precisely the other way round. When religions decide to dispense with violence, coercion or political pressure, this serves to produce a platform upon which religious groups exist alongside each other, in spite of all the differences, and are able to enter into dialogue with each other. In doing so, each religious community exercises its faith to the full extent and is allowed to spread its faith. Furthermore, all the members of such a society are free to choose which religion they want to follow and which religion they do not want to follow.

Also, in the case of Christianity and Islam, it is apparent that unity has not been achieved between the different theological schools in every detail. One can, for instance, think about the differences between Shi'ite and Sunni Islam or between Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic Christianity. Whenever these different schools are in a position to co-exist peacefully in the same country, the reason is not because they agree about everything. Rather, it is either because they have been forced by the state to co-exist peacefully (which hardly represents a permanent solution), or because they have themselves decided to limit their differences to the area of theology and to discussions about the faith, and have decided to not argue it out in the political realm.

Peace in the political realm cannot be required via theological uniformity. On the contrary, it is obvious that individual governments can also conduct war against each other when they share the same religious convictions. Instead, we have to acknowledge that religious freedom is a

basic right for all people, in particular for those, however, who are at variance with our own convictions.

In its resolution for religious freedom, the World Evangelical Alliance expresses it as follows: 'The WEA differentiates between advocating the rights of members of other or no religions and endorsing the truth of their beliefs. Advocating the freedom of others can be done without accepting the truth of what they believe.'<sup>13</sup>

### **Eight Propositions**

The ten following propositions try to sort typical arguments used from the Bible in favour of freedom of religion and belief. They are a result of searching the major documents on the topic of the Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance. All three embrace religious freedom, as is shown by the joint 2011 document 'Christian Witness in a multi-religious World', and all use similar lines of Biblical arguments, as this document proves.

*Thesis 1:* Ethics and mission belong together. Christian witness is not an area where ethics do not apply; it requires an ethical foundation so that we truly do what Christ has instructed us to do.

In 1 Peter 3:15-17 one finds a form of complementarity. On the one hand, there is the need for witness if not apologetics (see the Greek word *apologia*, which originally was a speech in court presented in one's defence). On the other hand, there is a need for 'gentleness and respect' – respect for the dignity of the other person: 'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason [Greek: *apologia*] for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...' The dignity of a person does not make us hide our hope but rather speak about it clearly, explain it, and defend it. And yet, questions behind which lie bad intentions, to which we give clear answers, can never permit us to treat the dignity of our discussion partner with contempt. Both sides complement each other, and they represent indispensable fundamental building blocks of our faith.

According to 1 Peter 3:15-17, people do not speak directly with God when they speak with us. On the one hand, we can certainly be God's ambassadors and bear witness about the hope which is in us. And yet, on the other hand, we are also only humans saved solely through God's grace and not due to our own virtue. We long to see people find peace with God, receive his forgiveness, and trust God as the sole truth. However, they have not sinned against *us*. They should not bow before us, and *we* are not the

---

<sup>13</sup> 'Resolution on Religious Freedom and Solidarity with the Persecuted Church of the World Evangelical Alliance' (30th October 2008): [www.iirf.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/PDFs/WEA\\_Res\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.iirf.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/PDFs/WEA_Res_ENG.pdf)

truth and are not in possession of the truth in *everything* we say. No Christian is a 'Dr Know-It-All'.

Whoever presumes to have found the 'truth' in Jesus and that this is, above all, the truth about our relationship to God and how we find peace with God through grace, forgiveness, and redemption, and whoever invokes the written revelation of the Judeo-Christian tradition, has to simultaneously take everything regarding content and demeanour into consideration which represents serious restraints on a conversation with someone who thinks differently. 'Speaking the truth in love' (Eph. 4:15) belong together, also in dialogue and in missionary witness. Gentleness is not only an inevitable consequence of the fact that Christians proclaim the God of love and should love our neighbour and want to love our neighbour. Rather, it is also a consequence of the knowledge that Christians are themselves just pardoned sinners and are not God.

*Thesis 2:* Mission efforts esteem human rights and do not wish to disregard the dignity of human beings, but rather to honour and foster human dignity.

Christians always look at other people as images of God (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1), even if these individuals have other views of themselves. From the point of view of Christianity, human rights are not derived from whether one believes in God or is a Christian. Rather, human rights are derived from the fact that everyone is in equal measure created by God and is created according to his image. Indeed, everyone is created equal, whether man or woman. For that reason, all people should be treated without showing favouritism towards any person (Rom. 2:11; Jas 2:9). There are religions which grant only their own adherents human rights. Christians, however, defend the human rights of their enemies – and pray for them and love them (Mt 5:44; Luke 6:27).

*Thesis 3:* It is reprehensible to bring about conversions through the use of coercion, deceitfulness, trickery or bribery, not to mention that, by definition, the results of such cannot be a true conversion and turning towards God from the depths of one's heart in belief and trust.

A conversion is a deeply personal stirring of an individual's heart towards God which is thought through to the end. When people say to us that they want to convert, we always have to grant them room and time to decide, to refrain from badgering them, and should not hastily baptise them. Instead, we should be sure that they truly know what they are doing and want it from a position of conviction and belief.

Honesty and transparency should also hold sway as far as what the Christian faith is, and what is expected of Christians after their conversion. Christianity is not a secret circle. Rather, it is open for the general public and seeks to be transparent for everyone. Christians have nothing to hide (Mt 10:26-27) or to conceal beforehand only to reveal later on. Jesus said to those who wanted to become his followers: 'Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?' (Luke 14:28; see also verses 27-33).

Christians have to help people to count the cost and not prematurely plug them into Christian churches, only to see people later discovering that they were misled.

*Thesis 4:* One has to differentiate between advocating the human rights and religious freedom of adherents of other religions, or of individuals without any religious affiliation, and endorsing their claims to truth.

Strictly speaking, it is possible to advocate liberty, religious freedom and freedom of conscience for others without holding their convictions to be true or sharing those convictions. Conversely, it is also derived from this that when agreement in questions of truth is lacking, one never has the right to oppress another individual.

Christians who proclaim the message might regret with bleeding hearts that other people reject the offer of redemption in Christ, but they never have the right to declare these people to be less than human, to attack them with words, to stir up the state powers to hatred against them, to entreat judgement against them, or to carry out such judgement.

Historical experience teaches the opposite: to share the same truth or to largely agree on questions relating to religion does not on its own prevent wars of religion against each other. Many major wars of religion have occurred between religions, and Christianity is no exception.

*Thesis 5:* Religious freedom applies to all people, not just to Christians.

This is not only a political demand made upon Christians. Rather, it arises from the Christian faith itself. As already stated, God has created all people in his image (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1), not only *Christians*. God desires – as mentioned in the Old Testament again and again – to be loved with all one's *heart* and not out of coercion. Accordingly, the most inner orientation of an individual's conscience and heart cannot be forced.

God has forbidden us to carry out any type of sentence on our critics or to punish people for their 'unbelief'. Jonah also experienced that God was more merciful towards 'godless' Nineveh than Jonah was himself, who would have preferred to have seen judgement upon Nineveh (Jon. 4:1-10). And Jesus clearly rejected the thinking of his disciples to have fire sent down from heaven upon villages which spurned him (Luke 9:51-56). With that said, Christians are for all time forbidden from punishing other people for rejecting Jesus or the Gospel (never mind their own convictions).

*Thesis 6:* Since the state does not belong to any religion and is not to proclaim the Gospel, but rather desires what is good and just for all people, and because God has granted human dignity to all people since he has created everyone (Gen. 1: 26-27; 5:1), Christians work together with the adherents of all religions and worldviews for the good of society – as far as religions allow it and reciprocate.

This directly applies to maintaining religious freedom, to all human rights, and it basically applies to peace and justice. Christians will always be involved with adherents of other religions and worldviews in the

establishment of a state by being jointly active. In Romans 13:1-7, Paul does not presuppose that the 'authorities' are composed only of Christians. On the contrary, he puts Christians under the state, which is obligated to maintain justice, regardless of which religion or worldview its representatives hold.

Paul admonishes Christians: 'If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone' (Rom. 12:18), whereby he follows Jesus, who said: 'Blessed are the peacemakers' (Mt 5:9) and 'When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house'' (Luke 10:5). James, the brother of Jesus, is very reminiscent of his brother's words when he says: 'Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness' (Jas 3:18). In 1 Timothy 2:1-2, Paul expands this command to encompass the world of politics: '... that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.'

Christians build up relationships of trust and love to all people, religious and non-religious, and this is the precondition for a peaceful and functioning co-existence. Tension and conflict between people can only be resolved if they speak with each other.

*Thesis 7:* The state is to protect religious freedom and is not to spread 'our' religion.

Whoever looks at which tasks the New Testament ascribes to the state sees that the propagation and promotion of a certain religion *do not* belong among them, but that peace and justice for *everyone* do. Christians are subject to the state in issues of worldly justice. Indeed, Paul is able to describe the non-Christian state as nothing less than 'God's servant' when it punishes Christians who do wrong (Rom. 13:1-7). That throughout history Christians have often handled this completely differently in so-called 'Christian' countries changes nothing about the fact that a Christian should not have to bend his faith when he advocates religious freedom. Rather, this arises organically from his faith.

According to the Biblical understanding, the monopoly on force is something which only the state has. It has neither the task of proclaiming the Gospel nor of enlarging the Christian church, and is to keep itself out of questions of conscience and religion (in Romans 13:1-7 it is always a matter of 'doing evil' and not of thinking evil), for which reason it as 'God's servant' expressly has to punish Christians who do wrong (Rom. 13:1-7).

The state has to protect Christians only insofar as it should protect everyone who does what is good. And it only has to limit or punish Christians insofar as its service for justice and peace impedes and has to punish everyone who plans or exercises violence, regardless of whether or how they are religiously motivated or not. Christians thus demand for themselves no greater right to religious freedom than others. And they want to 'live at peace with everyone' (Rom. 12:18), not only with those who are like them.

*Thesis 8:* Religious freedom includes religious freedom for one's own children.

As bitter as the experience might be when the children of committed Christians do not make, or initially do not make, the Christian faith the centre of their lives, and as much as it is a matter of course that raising a child in the Bible is raising a child up in love to God and towards one's neighbours (Deut. 5:6-9), raising a child also means to bring the child into adulthood where he or she becomes independent (2 Tim. 3:17; Eph. 4:11-16). This includes issues of one's faith (2 Tim. 3:14-17; Deut. 31:12-13). Every form of coercion exercised upon the next generation so that they do not leave 'the church' is unbiblical, whether it emanates from the parents, the environment, the church, or the state. Belief in God cannot be forced. Rather, it is the most profound and most personal decision and attitude of the heart of the individual who turns in love toward the creator and redeemer who loves him.

The Baptists at the time of the Reformation and the later Baptist-oriented free churches expressed this directly. They rejected infant baptism and only accepted the baptism of people who demonstrated religious maturity, just as in the same way the voluntary nature of faith and of church membership was and is central for them. The need of an independent decision on the part of the next generation can be clearly maintained with infant baptism in another way, for instance, through what was invented by Martin Bucer, confirmation. As much as Christians wish to raise their children to turn to Christ by example, and by convincing discussion and teaching, what is central is one's own personal thinking through the issue and making a decision based on an individual's own faith ('conversion'); that also applies for one's own children. That does not abolish the need for consciously Christian child-rearing.

# GLOBAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Brian Grim

‘In God we trust, all others bring *data*’ – W. Edwards Deming

‘We are drowning in information and starving for *knowledge*’

Rutherford D. Roger

In the following pages, I’ll apply these two provocative quotes, both from the preface of *The Elements of Statistical Learning*,<sup>1</sup> to freedom of religion or belief with Deming’s goal for statistical data squarely in view: providing ‘a rational basis for action’.<sup>2</sup>

I’ll begin by briefly looking at data on religion and its projected growth. Next, I’ll review the growth in religious restrictions and hostilities in today’s world, with a special focus on two things: the connection between government policy and religious hostilities, and the adverse impact of religious restrictions and hostilities in social and economic outcomes. I’ll conclude on a hopeful note – new studies indicate that the rising global tide of religious restrictions and hostilities can be rolled back through the self-interested actions of businesses to help support interfaith understanding, peace and religious freedom.

## Data

We live in a world where more than *eight in ten* people follow a religion. And among the 16% who don’t, many of them have *some* religious beliefs or engage in some religious practices.<sup>3</sup> Most of these believers live in Asia.

Moreover, we live in a world where religion is going to increase in the decades ahead.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, the prospects for continued growth of

Copyrighted Material

<sup>1</sup> Hastie, Trevor, Robert Tibshirani and Jerome Friedman, *The Elements of Statistical Learning: Data Mining, Inference, and Prediction, Second Edition* (New York: Springer, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> W. Edwards, Demings, ‘On the Distinction between Enumerative and Analytic Survey’, in *Journal of the American Statistical Association* (JASA: 48, 1953) 244-55.

<sup>3</sup> Pew Research Center, 2012: ‘The Global Religious Landscape’: [www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec](http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec) (accessed 18th November 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Grim, Brian J. and Todd M. Johnson, Gina Bellofatto and Vegard Skirbekk, *Yearbook of International Religious Demography 2014* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2014).

religious populations appear strong as religious people are younger on average than the world's religiously unaffiliated population.<sup>5</sup>

This means that even if all women had the same number of children, religious populations would still outgrow the religiously unaffiliated because there are more religious women of child-bearing age today than religiously unaffiliated women. In part, the age differences reflect the geographic distribution of religious groups. Those with a large share of adherents in fast-growing developing countries tend to have younger populations. Those concentrated in China and in advanced industrial countries, where population growth is slower, tend to be older.

The findings of a 2014 study on religious freedom (Pew Research Center, 2014) show that 43% of the world's countries have high or very high restrictions on religion, but because several of these countries are very populous, about three-quarters (76%) of the world's population – totalling 5.3 billion people – live with high restrictions.

These findings are based on a comprehensive analysis of 198 countries and territories. Each year since 2006, the team at the Pew Research Center has carefully studied the laws and constitutions for each of these countries as well as human rights reports from major international sources – such as the United Nations, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Human Rights First, the European Union and the US State Department. Based on these sources, we count up and categorise each reported *government restriction on religion* and each reported *social hostility involving religion*, and use these data to create indexes.

There's one important thing to keep in mind – the Pew Research study does not place a value judgement on any particular restriction. In France, for instance, the government's ban of the *burqa* – the Muslim full body covering – has considerable political and public support. In our study, this ban still counts as a restriction *regardless of its popularity*. In that way, Pew Research is like a thermometer. It measures the problem, but does not diagnose or suggest a treatment. I will, however, make some suggestions to that end in the second half of this chapter.

With that in mind, what is meant by 'government restrictions on religion' and 'social hostilities involving religion'? Two examples can illustrate these.

In Pakistan, blasphemy is legally punishable by imprisonment or death – in other words, the government can put you to death for remarks or actions considered to be *critical of God or the Sacred*. That's a government restriction. But when assassins killed two prominent Pakistani politicians *because* they spoke out against the blasphemy law and religious intolerance, that's a social hostility involving religion.

---

<sup>5</sup> Pew Research Center, 2012: 'The Global Religious Landscape': [www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec](http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec) (accessed 18th November 2014).



Another example: In Indonesia, the government has declared that Ahmadiyyas have strayed from true Islam, and therefore prohibits them from sharing their faith with anyone outside their mosques. That's a government restriction. But when Indonesian mobs kill Ahmadiyyas and burn down their mosques, that's a social hostility involving religion.

My study measures twenty different types of government restrictions on religion, and adds them up in a Government Restrictions Index. The more restrictions and the greater their severity, the higher the score. Based on this index, the study finds that almost two thirds of people live in countries with high or very high government restrictions. Besides those just mentioned, these include:

- restrictions on the wearing of religious symbols, which is limited in more than a quarter of all countries. For instance, the European Court of Human Rights recently found that British law does not adequately protect an employee's right to display religious symbols in the workplace – such as wearing a cross.
- restrictions also include imprisonments, which occur in nearly a third of all countries. In Burma, for instance, Buddhist monks continue to languish in prison cells for their role as clergy in promoting human rights and democracy.
- government restrictions on converting from one religion to another occur in about a quarter of countries. For example, five of India's 28 states have anti-conversion laws. In practice, these laws are used to prevent Hindus from converting to Islam or Christianity. And when conversions occur, they are sometimes met with hostilities. I'll talk more about the association of religious restrictions and hostilities shortly.

The study measures thirteen different types of social hostilities involving religion, and adds them up in a Social Hostilities Index. The more hostilities and the greater their severity, the higher the score. Based on this index, the study finds that half the world's people live in countries with high or very high social hostilities related to religion. Besides those just mentioned, these include:

- sectarian violence occurs in 17%, or more than one out of every seven countries worldwide. In Iraq, for instance, even though the civil war ended years ago, acts of sectarian violence continue to occur on an almost daily basis.
- religiously motivated terrorists are active in more than a third of countries worldwide, including France as recently as 2015, where a rabbi and several Jewish school children were gunned down in a brazen act of terror.
- the use of violence to enforce religious norms occurs in a third of countries worldwide. For instance, in Indonesia – where religious belief is required by law – Alexander An was attacked by angry mobs after he declared his non-belief on an atheist website. And,

when police showed up to intervene, rather than arresting the mob, Alexander was arrested on charges of blasphemy. Again, another example of the association between government restrictions and social hostilities.

One important contribution of this study is that it tracks changes over time. As mentioned at the start, 43% of countries have high or very high restrictions on religion. But the situation just five years earlier (in 2010) was markedly different – then, just 29% of countries had high or very high restrictions. That's nearly a 50% increase, which by any standards indicates a crisis in the making.

Another contribution of this study is that it tracks how countries and regions score on the indexes. In our studies, we divide the world into five major regions so we can look at broad geographic patterns. Looking at the regions, religious restrictions and social hostilities increased in each of them over the five years of the study – in the Americas, sub-Saharan Africa, Europe and Asia-Pacific. But restrictions rose most substantially in the Middle East and North Africa – including throughout 2011, when the political uprisings known as the Arab Spring occurred.

What contributes to these high and rising religious restrictions and hostilities in the Middle East and North Africa? Data sheds light on this question.

The study finds that, on average, each of the thirteen types of social hostilities involving religion is associated with higher government restrictions, not lower. The study finds that among the thirteen types of social hostilities studied, sectarian or communal violence between religious groups has the strongest association with government restrictions on religion.

Again, how does the Middle East and North Africa stack up against the rest of the world on this measure? Sectarian violence is four times more prevalent among the countries in the region than elsewhere in the world. So, it's not surprising that government restrictions are high.

Likewise, the study finds that, on average, each type of government restriction is associated with more social hostility, not less. And among the twenty types of government restrictions analysed, high government favouritism of one religion at the expense of others has the strongest association with social hostilities involving religion.

How does the Middle East and North Africa compare with the rest of the world on this measure? About eight times the share of countries in the region have high or very high government favouritism of religion compared with the rest of the world. So, it's not surprising that social hostilities are high.

Government restrictions on religion also can have impacts or influences across national borders. For example, in 2012, Hamza Kashgari, a 23-year-old newspaper columnist in Saudi Arabia, tweeted doubts about Muhammad on the prophet's birthday. He was accused of blasphemy and

received death threats. He then fled Saudi Arabia hoping to reach Australia, but he was detained in Malaysia. Malaysian police honoured an extradition request by Saudi authorities and he was flown back to a Saudi jail cell. So, a religious restriction in Saudi Arabia was able to reach thousands of miles beyond its borders and be enforced by another government.

Yet, the news is not all negative because this new way of looking at freedom of religion or belief is stimulating discussion and action among groups such as the United Nations, the European Parliament and the US Congress.

In 2011-12 alone, the sources used in our study reported that 83% of countries had government or societal initiatives to reduce religious restrictions or hostilities. For example, Austria hosted this year's United Nations Alliance of Civilizations annual meeting, and focused on the rising tide of religious restrictions and hostilities, engaging world and religious leaders on the topic, including Cardinal John and Imam Jega of Nigeria – a country beset by many of the social hostilities described above.

And in Brazil last spring, a freedom of religion or belief festival brought an estimated 30,000 people to the streets of São Paulo in support of freedom of religion or belief in the country. The event featured rock bands, politicians and religious leaders from more than a dozen faiths. One result of the festival was that the government of São Paulo – Brazil's commercial centre and the western hemisphere's most populous city at 20 million – declared that henceforth 25th May would be 'freedom of religion or belief day'.

It was that event that began to change my approach to freedom of religion or belief and set me on a new course that now focuses on possibilities rather than problems, and opportunities rather than obstacles.

Among the 25 most populous countries, only six have low government restrictions on religion (average between 2006 and 2012), with Brazil having the lowest of all. Brazil has lower restrictions, in fact, than the United States, where restrictions have been rising.

Freedom of religion or belief is indeed highly valued in Brazil. For instance, when Brazilians were asked in a 2006 Pew Research survey whether it was important to live in a country where there was freedom of religion *for religions other than their own*, nearly the same percentage of people indicated that this was important (95%) as indicated that it was important to live in a country where *they could practise their own religion freely* (96%). That's significant, because among the other countries surveyed, the average gap was 14 percentage points.

Low religious restrictions and support for freedom of religion or belief are notable in a country that is undergoing what is perhaps one of the most dynamic religious shifts in the world today. In fact, it can be argued that it is the respect for freedom of religion or belief among the majority faith, Roman Catholicism, that emerged after Vatican II that has made the religious shift from nearly 100% Catholic to now about 70% Catholic occur

without violence. Most of the change has been to Protestant, Evangelical and Pentecostal faiths.

### **The Connection of Freedom of Religion or Belief to Socio-Economic Outcomes**

Brazil is one of the case studies in my recent Cambridge University Press book with Roger Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Conflict and Persecution in the 21st Century*.<sup>6</sup> In it we show that, contrary to popular opinion, ensuring freedom of religion or belief for all reduces violent religious persecution and conflict. Others have suggested that restrictions on religion are necessary to maintain order or preserve a peaceful religious homogeneity. We show that restricting freedom of religion or belief is associated with higher levels of violent persecution.

We also found that freedom of religion or belief is embedded within a much larger bundle of civil liberties. At the core of religious expression is the freedom of speech and at the core of freedom to worship is the freedom to assemble. To claim freedom of speech, without allowing for a freedom to express religious beliefs, quickly erodes freedom of speech in other areas. Likewise, allowing for restrictions on the assembly of religious groups opens the door for curtailing the activities of other groups as well. The denial of freedom of religion or belief is inevitably intertwined with the denial of other freedoms.

Because freedom of religion or belief is intertwined with other civil liberties, the outcomes of these liberties are also closely associated. Harvard economist and Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen<sup>7</sup> argues that human freedom is not just the general opportunity for freedom in the abstract, but the specific processes within a country that result in better lives.

We noted that statistical associations between freedom of religion or belief and other civil liberties, press freedoms and political freedoms are especially striking. The strong and highly significant correlations suggest that the freedoms are closely intertwined. We also found that there is also growing evidence that this group of freedoms, including freedom of religion or belief, is associated with the well-being of those in society. Wherever freedom of religion or belief is high, there tends to be fewer incidents of armed conflict, better health outcomes, higher levels of earned income, prolonged democracy, and better educational opportunities for women.

In the years since the book came out, I have focused more on the connection between freedom of religion or belief and economic outcomes.

---

<sup>6</sup> Grim, Brian J., and Roger Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Conflict and Persecution in the 21st Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Amartya K. Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Knopf, 1999).

In a recent peer-reviewed study,<sup>8</sup> my colleagues and I found that freedom of religion or belief is one of only three factors significantly associated with global economic growth. Our study looked at GDP growth for 173 countries in 2011 and controlled for two dozen different financial, social and regulatory influences. This does not prove that freedom of religion or belief causes economic growth, but it indicates that we would do well to better understand its relationship to economic outcomes.

The study suggests that as the world navigates away from years of poor economic performance, freedom of religion or belief may be an unrecognised asset for economic recovery and growth, according to this new study. The study examines and finds a positive relationship between freedom of religion or belief and ten of the twelve pillars of global competitiveness, as measured by the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index.

The study,<sup>9</sup> however, goes beyond simple correlations by empirically testing and finding the tandem effects of government restrictions on religion and social hostilities involving religion (as measured by the Pew Research Center) to be detrimental to economic growth while controlling for 23 other theoretical, economic, political, social and demographic factors.

The new study<sup>10</sup> also directly *further the arguments* about the detrimental effects of restrictions on religious freedom in *The Price of Freedom Denied*. That research showed that freedom of religion or belief is a key ingredient to peace and stability, as measured by the absence of violent religious persecution and conflict. This is particularly important for business because, where stability exists, there is more opportunity to invest and conduct normal and predictable business operations, especially in new and emerging markets.

The new study observes that religious hostilities and restrictions create climates that can drive away local and foreign investment, undermine sustainable development, and disrupt huge sectors of economies. Such has occurred in the ongoing cycle of religious regulation and hostilities in Egypt, which has adversely affected the tourism industry, among other sectors. Perhaps most significant for future economic growth, the study notes that young entrepreneurs are pushed to take their talents elsewhere due to the instability associated with high and rising religious restrictions and hostilities.

Freedom of religion or belief, when respected within a company, can also directly benefit the bottom line. This includes both improved morale

---

<sup>8</sup> Grim, Brian J., Greg Clark and Robert Snyder, 'Is Religious Freedom Good for Business? A Conceptual and Empirical Analysis', in *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* (Vol. 10: Article 4, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Pew Research Center, 2014: 'Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High': [www.pewforum.org/2014/01/14/religious-hostilities-reach-six-year-high](http://www.pewforum.org/2014/01/14/religious-hostilities-reach-six-year-high)

<sup>10</sup> Brian, Clark and Snyder, 'Is Religious Freedom Good for Business?'

and lower costs. For instance, the clothing retailer Abercrombie & Fitch fought and lost a religious discrimination case in 2013 related to firing a Muslim stock girl for wearing a scarf in violation of the company's dress code. The case resulted not only in substantial legal costs but also in negative national publicity.

Moreover, freedom of religion or belief is a human right protected in numerous treaties and agreements, including the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The study suggests that businesses may gain a competitive advantage by meeting the expectations of stakeholders who are increasingly demanding that companies play a positive role in addressing issues of social concern and fairness.

The study's findings are timely because the research shows that the largest markets for potential growth are in countries where freedom of religion or belief is highly restricted – casting a question mark over the long-term sustainability of growth in countries such as China.

While freedom of religion or belief and religious diversity are different concepts, the presence of religious diversity is a sign of some degree of freedom of religion or belief. In this, the case of China is of note because the improvement in freedom of religion or belief in the country since the 1960s may in part explain some of China's economic success.

During the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, religion was completely outlawed and people were routinely beaten and killed for having superstitious or religious beliefs. While it is true that today China has very high government restrictions on religion relative to other countries in the world, current conditions are far less restrictive than they were in the 1960s and 1970s.

Today, China has the world's largest Buddhist population, the largest folk religionist population, the largest Taoist population, the ninth largest Christian population, and the seventeenth largest Muslim population – ranking between Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

It is undeniable that, had the Cultural Revolution's draconian restrictions on religion and all segments of society continued, China's economic progress would not have been possible. The question remains whether China's economic success can be maintained without granting greater freedom of religion or belief in the years and decades ahead.

Copyrighted Material

### **Why Might Freedom of Religion or Belief be Good for Business?**

There are at least seven reasons why freedom of religion or belief might be something that China and other countries should consider as they plan for *sustainable* prosperity.

First, freedom of religion or belief *fosters respect* by protecting something that more than eight in ten people worldwide, 84% according to a recent Pew Research study, identify with – a religious faith. Given that so many people are attached to a faith, to violate the free practice of religion

runs the risk of alienating the mass of humanity, something that certainly would not be ideal for morale and socio-economic progress. Indeed, forcing the 16% of people with no specific religious attachment to have a religion would likewise be alienating. Freedom of religion or belief ensures that people, regardless of their belief or non-belief, are accorded equal rights and equal opportunity to have a voice in society.

Second, freedom of religion or belief *reduces corruption*, one of the key ingredients of sustainable economic development. For instance, research finds that laws and practices restricting freedom of religion or belief are related to higher levels of corruption. This is borne out by simple comparison between the Pew Research Center's 2011 Government Restrictions on Religion Index with the 2011 Corruption Perceptions Index. Eight of the ten most corrupt countries have high or very high governmental restrictions on religious liberty. Freedom of religion or belief also implies that business people can draw on religious values and moral teachings in their businesses. The attempt to force businesses to act as secular, neutral, value-free organisations may be one contributing factor to the corruption, greed and short-sighted decisions that lead to the global economic collapse of 2008 that still affects many people and nations today. Allowing religion to inform business ethics is certainly an under-used activity implied by freedom of religion or belief.

Third, research clearly demonstrates that freedom of religion or belief *engenders peace* by reducing religion-related violence and conflict. Conversely, when freedom of religion or belief is not respected and protected, the result is often violence and conflicts that disrupt normal economic activities. Religious hostilities and restrictions create climates that can drive away local and foreign investment, undermine sustainable development, and disrupt huge sectors of economies. Such has occurred in the ongoing cycle of religious regulations and hostilities in Egypt, which – as already noted – has adversely impacted the tourism industry.

Fourth, freedom of religion or belief *encourages broader freedoms* that contribute to positive socio-economic development. The already mentioned economist and Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen,<sup>11</sup> for instance, argues that societal development requires the removal of sources of 'unfreedom'. And restrictions on freedom of religion or belief are certainly a source of unfreedom. Removing impediments to freedom of religion or belief facilitates freedom of other kinds. And research finds empirical evidence of this relationship. Freedom of religion or belief is highly correlated with the presence of other freedoms and a variety of positive social and economic outcomes, ranging from better health care to higher incomes for women. While correlations are not causation, the correlations suggest that a more robust future research agenda should focus on understanding these connections better because it appears the freedoms rise or fall together.

---

<sup>11</sup> Sen, *Development as Freedom*.



Fifth, freedom of religion or belief *develops the economy*. When religious groups operate in a free and competitive environment, religion can play a measurable role in the human and social development of countries. For instance, sociologist Robert Woodberry<sup>12</sup> finds that the presence of proselytising Protestant faiths, i.e. faiths competing for adherents, was associated with economic development throughout the world in the previous century. Even before that, Alexis de Tocqueville recognised that, in the early US, such Protestant associations of these sorts established seminaries, constructed inns, created churches, disseminated books, and founded hospitals, prisons and schools. And these contributions are not just a legacy from the past. Katherine Marshall,<sup>13</sup> former director of the Development Dialogue on Values and Ethics at the World Bank and former director in the World Bank's Africa and East Asia regions, also recognises that faith communities not only provide education and health services but provide also social safety nets for orphans, disabled people and people who fall behind.

Sixth, freedom of religion or belief *overcomes over-regulation* that accompanies certain types of religious restrictions that directly limit or harm economic activity. A few current examples from the Muslim-majority countries – a set of countries with particularly high religious restrictions – are illustrative of how the lack of freedom of religion or belief contributes to worse economic and business outcomes. Religious restrictions among Muslim-majority countries impacting businesses take many forms. One direct religious restriction impacting economic freedom involves Islamic finance. For instance, businesses involved in creating, buying or selling Islamic financial instruments can find the situation that one Islamic law (*shari'a*) board deems a particular instrument acceptable while another board does not, making the instrument's acceptance on stock exchanges subject to differing interpretations of *shari'a*. Religious restrictions also include legal barriers for certain import and export industries, such as the halal food market. And, certain government laws and restrictions on freedom of religion or belief can stoke religiously-motivated hostilities that disrupt markets throughout the region. Examples range from employment discrimination against women over such things as headscarves to the misuse of anti-blasphemy laws to attack business rivals. And perhaps most significantly for future economic growth, research shows that the instability associated with high and rising religious restrictions and hostilities can influence young entrepreneurs to take their talents elsewhere.

And seventh, freedom of religion or belief *multiplies trust*. Freedom of religion or belief, when respected within a company, can also directly

---

<sup>12</sup> Robert D. Woodberry, 'The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy', in *American Political Science Review* (Vol. 106, No. 2, May 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Pew Forum, Religion and International Development: interview with Katherine Marshall, 1 (March 2006): [www.pewforum.org/Government/Religion-and-International-Development.aspx](http://www.pewforum.org/Government/Religion-and-International-Development.aspx)



benefit a company's bottom line. These include both lower costs and improved morale. An example of lower costs includes less liability for litigation. Respect for reasonable accommodation of freedom of religion or belief in the workplace can improve employee morale, increase retention of valued employees, and help with conflict resolution. Moreover, businesses may gain a competitive advantage by engaging stakeholder expectations that are increasingly demanding that companies play a positive role in addressing environmental, social and governance challenges. As recognised by business consulting group McKinsey & Company, the ethical stakeholder has clearly emerged and is on the rise. Important business stakeholders include business partners, investors and consumers, and a growing segment of ethically sensitive customers tend to prefer companies that are responsive to human rights. Indeed, consumer and government preferences given to human-rights-sensitive companies may give a company an advantage in competitive markets and enable it to charge premium prices and land choice contracts. And recognising this human rights impact on branding, companies such as Gap have assumed shared responsibility for the conditions under which its goods are manufactured.

Given that freedom of religion or belief contributes to better economic and business outcomes, advances in freedom of religion or belief are in the self-interest of businesses, governments and societies. While this observation does not suggest that freedom of religion or belief is the sole or even main antidote to poor economic performance, it does suggest that freedom of religion or belief is related to economic success. Certainly, businesses would benefit from taking freedom of religion or belief considerations into account in their strategic planning, labour management and community interactions. For instance, when evaluating locations for future research and development operations, countries with good records on freedom of religion or belief may be a better environment to find societies open to innovation and experimentation.

### **Is Business Good for Freedom of Religion or Belief?**

So, there is some evidence that freedom of religion or belief is beneficial to the socio-economic health of countries and to business. But is the converse true – does good business help foster freedom of religion or belief?

In a forthcoming blog for the World Economic Forum, I address this question. In it I point out that the 9/11 al Qaeda attack on the World Trade Center twin towers – soaring symbols of development and progress – was not a random choice. In 2004, Osama bin Laden said in a taped speech, 'We are continuing this policy in bleeding America to the point of bankruptcy. Every dollar of al Qaeda defeated a million dollars [spent by the US],' including the 'loss of a huge number of jobs'.

And now, as the international community responds to ISIS's brutal conquest of large swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria, it is important to

remember its socio-economic context. The Iraqi public's chief concern in the years leading up to the ISIS offensive was unemployment, according to the Pew survey from 2012. Indeed, the lack of jobs arguably softened the ground for ISIS's sudden advance. Although a poor economy does not cause violent extremism, it can contribute to the conditions that terrorists can exploit.

So, if violent extremists provoke and take advantage of a bad economy to sow seeds of religious discord and violence, could peacemakers use good businesses to stimulate economic growth and foster interfaith understanding and peace?

One world leader did just that. In September 2013, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon set up the Business for Peace platform to harness the largely untapped potential of businesses to bring peace while they grow their bottom lines. Because businesses are at the crossroads of culture, commerce and creativity, they have the resources and incentive to make the world more peaceful.

That's the theory, but what about the practice?

A new set of case studies published by the UN Global Compact and the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation shows that the theory has some legs. Businesses in various parts of the world are addressing prejudices that feed violent extremism and terrorism. Although no single initiative is a magic bullet to end all such violence, taken together they offer a glimpse into the peacemaking potential of business. The initiatives include:

1. *Using marketing to cross borders:* Companies can make positive contributions to peace by mobilising advertising campaigns that bring people of various faiths and backgrounds together, as seen in the Coke Small World campaigns. One of their marketing initiatives, for instance, linked people in Pakistan and India through Coca-Cola vending machines equipped with live video feeds.
2. *Rewarding intercultural understanding:* Cross-cultural dialogue and co-operation is an essential part of the daily operations for multinational companies, such as BMW. In collaboration with the UN Alliance of Civilizations, the BMW Group offers an annual award for organisations that create innovative approaches to intercultural understanding, including interfaith understanding and peace. Among organisations that have won this award is a tour company in the Middle East, which offers new ideas for building bridges and bringing cultures together through collaborative Muslim-Jewish tourism in the Holy Lands.
3. *Supporting social entrepreneurs:* The business environment provides neutral ground for religious differences to give way to shared concerns of enterprise and economic development. For example, the Yola Innovation Machine in Adamawa State, Nigeria, supports companies and new entrepreneurs in conflict-affected areas to reduce extremism. Similarly, Petrobras in Brazil supports

business incubation for Afro-Brazilians, creating models for how small enterprises can have a significant impact in empowering members of marginalised ethno-religious communities, including a focus on women's empowerment.

4. *Boosting workforce diversity*: When businesses are sensitive to the religious and cultural issues around them, they not only make reasonable accommodations for faith in the workplace, but they can also address difficult unmet social needs. Businesses in Indonesia did this by organising a mass wedding for interfaith couples who had lived without legal status and with no ready means to become legitimately wed. By obtaining legal status, thousands of interfaith couples can now access the public health service, obtain education for their children, and have expanded opportunities for employment.

However, the peacemaking potential of business is largely unreported, unstudied and untapped. More research and incentivisation programmes would help change that.

First, we need to have a fuller picture of the range, impact and effectiveness of business initiatives to support interfaith understanding and peace. This includes more case studies showing the multifaceted benefits of these initiatives. For instance, Coca-Cola's India-Pakistan campaign not only sold more cans of Coke and increased intercultural understanding, but it also created new video technologies that enabled people to virtually touch hands and see each other eye-to-eye.

And second, we need to increase positive incentivisation of 'double bottom line' enterprises that do social good and make a profit. Possibilities include giving a higher profile to the global programmes like the Business for Peace Foundation that bestows awards for such initiatives, and multiplying programmes that facilitate practical knowledge of impact investment, such as the Impact Bond Fund and Impact Investment Programme at the Saïd Business School, at the University of Oxford.

Increasing such knowledge and incentives can inspire and give resources to a new generation of socially conscious business entrepreneurs and peacemakers. Imagine how different Iraq might be today if unemployment had been addressed by double bottom line investors rather than by terrorist recruiters.

Copyrighted Material

## Final Comments

Twenty-two years ago (1992), Boris Yeltsin and the leaders of the other republics of the Soviet Union converged suddenly and secretly in Alma-Ata, then the capital of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, where I was co-ordinating business, cultural and educational exchanges for the Kazakh leader, Nazarbaev. They met to dissolve the Soviet Union. This took place in the building where I had my office.

Within a short time, President Nazarbaev held a press conference in Alma-Ata with the US Secretary of State James Baker. During the press conference, Nazarbaev was asked whether the new country of Kazakhstan would have freedom of religion or belief. He looked around the room and answered, ‘Yes, of course! For the Muslims, the Christian Orthodox, and – pointing at me – for the foreigners.’

Hardly could I have imagined that 23 years later I’d be doing research that would allow President Nazarbaev – still the current president of Kazakhstan – to assess how well the intention he expressed has materialised in practice. And, how his initial intention to provide freedom of religion or belief may have been instrumental in not only holding together a country roughly split equally between Muslims and Christians, but also leading it to relative prosperity.

As this is a book on religious freedom from a variety of Christian viewpoints, it is useful to end highlighting a new field of thought, called ‘business as mission’. Resources for this approach can be found at [www.matstunehag.com/bam-think-tank-reports/](http://www.matstunehag.com/bam-think-tank-reports/). In conclusion, I quote from one of the foundational documents of this new movement (November 2013 issue of the Lausanne Global Analysis).

Business as Mission, BAM, is a new term but the underpinning concept is nothing new. Business as Mission is not a new discovery, but a rediscovery of biblical truths and practices.

Our first God-given mandate is the creation mandate (Genesis 1-3: we are to be creative and create good things, for ourselves and others, being good stewards of all things entrusted to us – even in the physical arena. This of course includes being creative in business – to create wealth. Wealth creation is a godly talent: ‘Remember the Lord and your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth’ (Deut. 8:18). As Christians we often focus more on wealth distribution, but there is no wealth to distribute unless it has been created.

God calls and equips some people to business. We need to affirm and encourage business people to exercise their calling with professionalism, excellence and integrity. Martin Luther puts it this way: ‘A cobbler, a smith, a farmer, each has the work and the office of his trade, and they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops, and every one by means of his own work or office must benefit and serve every other, that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, even as all the members of the body serve one another.’

Or as stated in the Business as Mission manifesto, from the Lausanne paper on BAM 2004: ‘We call upon the Church worldwide to identify, affirm, pray for, commission and release business people and entrepreneurs to exercise their gifts and calling as business people in the world – among all peoples and to the ends of the earth.’

We call upon business people globally to receive this affirmation and to consider how their gifts and experience might be used to help meet the

world's most pressing spiritual and physical needs through Business as Mission.

If business were only about maximising profit, it would be acceptable to get involved in human trafficking, which is relatively low-risk (few traffickers are caught and sentenced) and has a relatively high profit margin. If job creation were the only purpose of business, one could commend the Mafia for the jobs they create.

Businesses need to make a profit to survive but they should also look beyond that. Pope John Paul II wrote: 'The purpose of a business firm is not simply to make a profit, but is to be found in its very existence as a community of persons who in various ways are endeavouring to satisfy their basic needs, and who form a particular group at the service of the whole of society.'

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

# **SECTION TWO**

## **HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS**

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

# **A DOXOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR INTERPRETING DISCRIMINATION, PERSECUTION AND MARTYRDOM**

Christof Sauer and Dwi Maria Handayani

## **Introduction**

Some people might think you are not blessed by God when you are persecuted. They think it is a punishment by God. Is this the right framework to interpret suffering for Christ, or persecution and martyrdom? The following suggestions emanate from 'The Bad Urach Statement: Towards an evangelical theology of suffering, persecution and martyrdom for the global church in mission', and a thesis by Christof Sauer on how martyrdom and mission relate. These are based on exchange among authors from various cultural contexts.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter proposes a theological framework for theological thinking about this issue and tries to put the many different dimensions into perspective. It concludes with some theses on how mission and martyrdom relate.

The many different dimensions of a theology of martyrdom do not all have the same importance. It is not like spreading things equally out on a table, so that some do not dominate. And other dimensions should be treated first, because they provide something like a picture-frame for interpreting the other dimensions.

We think the glory of God and the glorification of God by man must be the starting-point for a theological assessment of suffering for Christ, persecution and martyrdom.

## **The Glorification of the Triune God as the Goal of his Work**

In order to better grasp why the glorification of the Triune God is the goal of his work, let us listen to Revelation 15:2-4 (italics ours):

---

<sup>1</sup> While theologies of martyrdom are rare finds in academic theology, there are nevertheless a number of independently developed approaches and works inspired by the same biblical roots. See in this volume, e.g. 'A theology of martyrdom' by Agne Nordlander. For a more extensive exploration in German about various strands of martyrdom theology in the different Christian traditions, see C. Sauer, *Martyrium und Mission* (Erlangen: Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene, 2015). The following is an evangelical consensus statement: C. Sauer (ed), *Bad Urach Statement: Towards an evangelical theology of suffering, persecution and martyrdom* (Bonn: VKW, 2010).



I saw before me what seemed to be a glass sea mixed with fire. And on it stood all the people who had been *victorious* over the beast and his statue and the number representing his name. They were all holding harps that God had given them. And *they were singing* the song of Moses, the servant of God, and *the song of the Lamb*: 'Great and marvellous are your works, O Lord God, the Almighty. Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations. Who will not fear you, Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. *All nations will come and worship before you*, for your righteous deeds have been revealed!'

In these verses, the imagery of Revelation paints a vision which connects the worship of God in all his glory with the witnesses and martyrs, and the goal of mission among the nations. Let me develop these thoughts in some rough paint strokes.

### *The Triune God – The Beginning and the Centre*

The Triune God needs to be the beginning of all theological deliberations in connection with martyrdom and mission. There is an exchange of love within the Trinity. This leads to the sending of the Son into the world by the Father – so that humankind can take part in this love. Christian martyrdom reflects this deepest proof of love: 'There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends' (John 15:13).

### *Mission and Martyrdom Have their Place in God's Plan of Salvation*

In my opinion, a salvation-historical missiology proves to be especially helpful for an adequate interpretation of suffering, persecution and martyrdom for Christ and their connection with the *missio Dei*. Christ's incarnation represents the decisive turning-point in history and thus becomes the centre of salvation history. The second focal point is the future *parousia* of Christ which will lead to God's visible rule and victory, the end of history and the re-creation of all things. Until that time, the old age will still continue and struggle against the new, as each excludes the other. For this reason, Christians are living with the tension that a new age has already begun but has not yet reached its complete, visible fulfilment.

In the interim – the time between the ascension of Christ and his *parousia* – his church is sent to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and to live it out in faithful witness, in life and in death. The suffering of the church for Christ is a sign of the church in this period.

Therefore the church should not consider suffering as a curse but as a gift: participation in Christ's ministry of suffering. Paul says in Colossians 1:24: 'Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.' In this verse Paul proclaims his joy as he was able to participate in the ministry of suffering. Similarly, Peter says in 1 Peter 4:14: 'If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are

blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.’ He continues that the church, instead of being ashamed of the suffering, needs to praise God, as he says in 4:16: ‘However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.’

The fundamental joy of the church in this period is the opportunity to participate in the ministry of suffering, and that through the suffering of the church, Christ is preached, the name of Christ is uplifted, and people are saved because of it.

### *God’s Glory – The Goal of Mission*

The goal of mission is not only the conversion of individual people or the planting of churches but the glorification of God in and through these, together with other forms of witness. The vision of Revelation 15:2-4 mentioned above is that the nations will come and kneel before God, the King of the nations, and worship him.

The glory [Greek: *doxa*] of God shines in all its greatness in the vision of the ‘new Jerusalem’ where God will dwell in the midst of men, among a people chosen from all nations. He will make all things new and finally bring to an end all the experiences of the oppressed, the persecuted and the martyrs – namely tears, death, suffering, pain and crying out in fear (Rev. 21:1-4). Until that day comes, the martyrs and witnesses of Christ will glorify God through their suffering.

Glory and suffering are both characteristic of the church’s life in the present age. As the church participates in Christ’s suffering, the church also participates in Christ’s glory. Paul says, ‘If indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory’ (Rom. 8:17). Peter says, ‘But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed’ (1 Pet. 4:13).

Paul has an eternal perspective on suffering and martyrdom and views it in terms of glory. He considers ‘that the suffering of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us’ (Rom. 8:18). In this present time, the church may suffer because of sin but when the time comes the glory ‘shall be revealed’. Only then, in the new heavens and the new earth, will the full weight of glory be revealed in those who believe.

### *The Martyrs and Witnesses of Christ Glorify God*

According to the biblical witness, God is honoured in many ways – in the life and death of his witnesses, in the Gospel itself, and in the trust of the church in his sovereignty. Radically speaking, human life and its preservation at any cost (e.g. by denying one’s faith) is not the highest priority, but the *doxa* of God and his Christ is. In the same way, God is honoured by the trust of the church in his sovereignty in spite of all massive

threats against her (Acts 4:23-30) and in her confidence in his provision for all of her needs (Heb. 4:16).

### *The Martyrs and Witnesses of Christ Receive a Share in God's Doxa*

As the report of the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7 shows, the vision of the glory of God granted to some of the martyrs just before death can be considered as an honour and encouragement given by God. Moreover, the presence of the *doxa* through the Holy Spirit of God has been promised as a spiritual reality to all Christians that are treated with disdain (1 Pet. 4:14; Mt 5:10; Luke 6).

### **The Promise of Heavenly Rewards**

In our view, the promises of heavenly rewards which are undeniably promised in the New Testament in connection with persecution and martyrdom need to be viewed in the light of God's overflowing grace, the glorification of God, and his glory which encompasses the martyrs.

In John's Revelation, in the message to the churches of Philadelphia and Laodicea, the 'crown of victory' promised to the steadfast witnesses is described as follows:

All who are victorious will become *pillars in the Temple of my God* (they have a liturgical role), and they will never have to leave it. And I will write on them *the name of my God* (expressing God's ownership over them), and they will be *citizens in the city of my God* – the new Jerusalem that comes down from heaven from my God (expressing their fellowship with God). And I will also write on them my new name (Rev. 3:12).

Those who are victorious will sit with me *on my throne*, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his throne (which is expressing a ruling and judging role) (Rev. 3:21).

Clearly, in God's new world, positions of leadership are due to the witnesses and martyrs based on their obedience, faithfulness and steadfastness in trials, which result in the maturity of their characters. The promise of a heavenly 'reward' is thus not something one could claim based on one's achievements, but a reward that honours faithfulness.

The 'crown of victory' is obviously the counterpart of the 'crown of thorns' which was ultimately the symbol of God's suffering as well as the symbol of his glory and majesty. Just as the 'crown of thorns' was changed into the 'crown of glory', so will our suffering be changed into glory.

In Revelation 4:9-11, the twenty-four elders fall down before Christ and cast their crowns before the throne saying, 'You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for you created all things, and by your will they exist and were created.'

### **The Antagonistic Dimension – A Subordinate Factor**

Persecution is particularly characterised by someone with malicious intent pursuing another. In the same way, martyrdom, among other things, is characterised by one person's death caused by another person with malicious intent. Even though this antagonistic dimension needs to be recognised in sober realism and may not be repressed, it needs, in our opinion, to remain theologically subject to the doxological dimension. Above all it must not determine our communication with non-Christians.

#### *Demonological Traits Need to Be Viewed from the Perspective of the Victory of the Kingdom of God*

The demonological dimension of persecution and martyrdom which is part of the antagonistic dimension, and of the clash of powers in the missionary encounter, should in the same way be subject to the doxological dimension and should be viewed from the perspective of the victory of the Kingdom of God.

Those who proclaim the Gospel are drawn into this conflict which constitutes a major cause of their suffering. It is difficult to explain fully the irrational brutality of the persecution suffered by Christians without recognising a demonic component. However, Satan needs to be referred to as a foe that has been defeated on the cross of Christ, though he can still hurt. In the proclamation of the Gospel it needs to be emphasised – especially in the face of oppression, persecution and lethal violence – that no power of the world can separate a person who trusts in Christ's victory from the love of God (Rom. 8:37-39).

To sum up this predominant doxological perspective: the Triune God is the source of mission and the goal of mission and martyrdom. The willingness to fulfil his commission as well as the readiness for martyrdom have their origin in the love of God. Thus, his love is the starting-point of all attempts to explore the mystery of martyrdom. Mission and martyrdom have their place in God's plan of salvation and their goal is his *doxa*. As can be deduced from some New Testament passages, the martyrs and witnesses of Christ glorify God in their witness and their suffering; they receive a share in his *doxa* and will be honoured by being given a greater responsibility in God's rule in his new world. This future glory vastly outweighs all the hostilities and struggles which are part of persecution and martyrdom. The various authors of these persecutions have already been overcome by Christ's victory, even though they still have some temporal power to cause damage.

### **Lament as the Voice of the Martyr**

Throughout the history of persecution and martyrdom, many Christians have found encouragement and strength in the Psalms. In Psalm 22 the

psalmist honestly cried out to God for he faced the brutality of the enemy without any reasons except his faith in God (vv. 6-8), and he described the viciousness of his enemy (vv. 12-18). In his agony, the Psalmist called on God, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?' Yet, in the midst of his suffering, he did not forget to praise the Lord and to give him glory: 'I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you' (v. 22).

The fact that Jesus used Psalm 22 is very significant. God the Father sent Jesus as the answer to the people's long cry of lament because of persecution. However, he himself endured the most brutal suffering and takes upon himself this lament as the representative of all persecuted churches to utter their innermost pain to God the Father. In his cries of lament Jesus glorifies his Father.

The suffering that Christ endured, as seen throughout this Psalm, resulted in glory that will be shared with all those whom he is not ashamed to call brothers (Heb. 2:11). Therefore Psalm 22:22 is quoted in Hebrews 2:11-12: 'So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, He says, 'I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises.'

If God's love as the origin, and God's *doxa* as the goal of mission and martyrdom, form the framework for their interpretation – where even lament has its place – the person, work and teaching of Jesus Christ need to be considered next as their normative centre.

### **The Connection between Mission and Passion of Christ (Christological Dimension)**

Jesus Christ as the centre of our faith plays the normative role in our view of suffering, persecution and martyrdom. Therefore it is crucial how we interpret his life and death. The way of Jesus, the Messiah, through suffering to glory is exemplary for his disciples. All Christian martyrdom has its basic foundational orientation and footing in Jesus Christ, the 'faithful and true witness' (Rev. 1:5; 3:14; cf. 1 Pet. 2:21-24; Heb. 2:14-18, 5:8). Since his earliest childhood, Jesus was persecuted, and his first sermon met with bitter resistance. Finally, he stood up as a witness to the truth during his questioning before his judges (John 18:37). To Jesus, the crucifixion was not at all a tragic failure of his mission, but rather its very fulfilment.

### **The Relationship of Mission and Passion in Following Christ (discipleship)**

A key question in any theology of martyrdom is how the cross of Christ relates to the cross of his disciples. The death of Jesus on the cross is both unique, compared to the cross of his followers, and at the same time serves

as a model for his followers. Jesus' death on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world as a substitutionary act is unique, completely sufficient, irreplaceable, unrepeatable, and cannot be copied. However, this does not negate the fact that as our representative, Jesus gave us a model to follow.<sup>2</sup> Therefore Christian suffering for Christ is a continuation of the suffering of Christ, and it is from him only that it receives its characteristic mark (John 17:18; 20:21). His disciples are treated today as he once was, because Christ lives in them, and they speak and act with his authority. Their fate is united with his. The core meaning of taking up one's cross in the discipleship of Jesus (Luke 9:23) is witnessing to Jesus Christ, even in a situation of persecution and martyrdom.<sup>3</sup>

The risen Christ continues his mission in and through them. Consequently, the means of their mission and their attitude of love and their behaviour in persecution have been established through his example. God in his sovereignty can use their suffering and even martyrdom for the extension of his kingdom.

### **Unity in Affliction as a Challenge and a Witness (Ecumenical Dimension)**

So far, at any time in history, there have always been some Christians who were more intensely persecuted and others who were less under pressure. The question here is, how those that are less and those that are more persecuted should relate to each other.

A Christian never suffers alone, and a Christian martyr never dies alone but is always a part of the body of Christ which sustains him or her. The body of Christ needs to be understood in three dimensions: across time, across space, and across divides. The Christian confessors and martyrs of the past and the present need to be rightly remembered. Those who are currently suffering are to remember that Christians all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering (1 Pet. 5:9). The body of Christ throughout the world participates in the suffering of members of the body of its time, through information, prayer, support, suffering and rejoicing with them. If one part of the body suffers, all parts are equally concerned (1 Cor. 12:26). The potential of ecumenical solidarity is built when Christians of different confessions and denominations suffer together for Christ.

A complication is added in cases where one Christian group is, or has been, persecuting another Christian group, or has been complicit with government repression against other groups. Then a healing of memories is

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf Y.K. Lee, *God's mission in suffering and martyrdom* (PhD for Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Cf G. Penner, *In the shadow of the cross: A biblical theology of persecution and discipleship* (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice 2004), 116-54.

necessary concerning persecution and martyrdoms caused by other Christians in the past.

A further point in these ecclesiological dimensions concerns group egoisms. Advocacy for persecuted Christians must never be sectarian, only focusing on those from one's own denomination or confession, but ignoring the plight of those with differing theological convictions. Martyrdom serves to build up the church because those suffering and martyred are blessed by God.<sup>4</sup>

### God's Mission for the Church (Missionary Dimension)

Suffering and martyrdom are not ends in themselves, but serve God's mission right to the end of time, and are linked to mission by multiple relationships (Mt 24:14). Suffering and the weakness of witness are a mode of mission (2 Cor. 12:9-10; 4:7-10), and martyrdom becomes the most radical form of witness. Witness to Christ is a core cause of suffering. While we might be perfect in contextualising our message and in avoiding any unnecessary offence, as messengers of Christ we must face the fact that the message of the cross has been, and always will be, a stumbling-block to those without Christ (1 Cor. 1:18, 23), and will attract the hostility of the world that does not accept the light coming into the world (John 1:4, 11). Suffering is a test of the genuineness of our mission rather than a mishap to be avoided at all costs.

The widely-quoted saying of the Church Father Tertullian, *Semen est sanguis Christianorum*,<sup>5</sup> often quoted out of context with a triumphalist undertone as 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church', gives rise to the important question of how persecution and church growth are related. Does persecution automatically and always lead to church growth? Or is it rather the growth of the church that leads to persecution?

A theologically reflected response must differentiate: even the catastrophes of world history can be used by God as vehicles for the progress of his kingdom, and he seems to use them in particular to achieve his purposes. The willingness to suffer for Christ can give the message of those suffering a more convincing power. While the seed that falls into the ground will bear much fruit over time according to God's promise, martyrdom does not automatically produce visible and immediate church growth. The 'fruit' of martyrdom remains a grace from God (John 12:24). While in some places persecution has led to the multiplication of the church, sometimes, in other parts of the world, heavy persecution has completely destroyed or marginalised churches. Martyrdom brings to a

---

<sup>4</sup> Cf 'Martyrdom – gate to the kingdom of heaven', in Peter Beyerhaus, *God's kingdom and the utopian error: Discerning the biblical kingdom of God from its political counterfeits* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway 1992), 163-79.

<sup>5</sup> Tertullian, *Apol* 50, 13.

violent end the voice of that particular witness and might discourage the witness of others, or might have the potential to silence the last and only witness.

### **Hope as Strength to Endure (Eschatological Dimension)**

The *eschatological* dimension appears to be indispensable. What then should our expectations be regarding the future? The period in which we live, is marked by the tension between the victory of Christ that has already been accomplished and its visible consummation which has not yet taken place (Mt 5:45; Rom. 8:19-22). Because Christ was raised from death, ascended to heaven and was installed as sovereign, we may rightly hope for a resurrection to a better life which gives us reason to stand firm and immovable in affliction, and reassures us that our work for God is not in vain, though deadly forces might seemingly destroy it (1 Cor. 15:58).

In contrast to optimistic visions of the future, dreaming of seamless transformation, the prophecies of the Bible foresee clearly an altogether troubled final stage of human and church history (Deut. 7; 1 Thess. 2; 2 Tim. 3:1-13; Rev. 13-19). Both the worldwide proclamation of the Gospel to all ethnic groups and distress reach a climax with the passing away of the old world and the completion of the new (Mt 24:9-25; Rev. 17:6; 6:9-11). This encourages each generation to discern and endure historically and locally-restricted preliminary forms of persecution in their own times as anticipation on a smaller scale of what is to follow later (1 John 2:18).<sup>6</sup>

Christians should not focus on the horrors of the coming end times, but they should joyfully<sup>7</sup> expect their returning Lord, as bridegroom, judge and king (Rev. 19:6-10; 21:1-5; 16:5-6). God is not in a hurry with his final victory. Rather, he is patient with humankind because he does not want anyone to perish, but wants to give everyone an opportunity for repentance (2 Pet. 3:4, 9).

This hope is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ in a new body guaranteeing the resurrection of our Lord. It is a motivation to witness and persevere in the face of persecution. Based on this hope, Christians live and work full of hope and expectation of the coming of their Lord Jesus Christ.

Copyrighted Material

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf ICN, Readiness to Suffer for Christ: A Pastoral Directive from the Second Ecumenical Congress of the International Christian Network in Bad Blankenburg, Germany, 15th-18th October 2006: [www.institut-diakrisis.de/PDEnglishVersion.pdf](http://www.institut-diakrisis.de/PDEnglishVersion.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Cf A. Fernando, *The call to joy and pain: embracing suffering in your ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007).



### Some Theses on the Relationship between Martyrdom and Mission

To summarise the above in a few short theses, the following answers, among others, have been found to the question of the relationship between the realities represented by the terms ‘mission’ and ‘martyrdom’:

1. Witness and suffering are two essential *characteristics* of the church of Jesus Christ until the *parousia*. Suffering is the other side of the coin of witness, and vice versa. They form part of one and the same reality.
2. Oppression, persecution and martyrdom of witnesses to Christ indicate the reality of a *spiritual struggle* for the salvation of the world.
3. From a theological point of view, among various possible other *reasons*, active witness for Christ, conversions to Christ, church growth and advocacy for justice are obvious, deeply spiritual reasons for the persecution and martyrdom of Christians.
4. The *way* of Christian mission leads via the cross to glory – as in the case of our Lord.
5. Christ’s power is hidden in the weakness of the outward *appearance* of his mission through his persecuted body on earth, while his *doxa* is present in them.
6. The Psalms of *lament* are biblical examples on how the people of God handled their difficult situations in the midst of persecution by pouring out their agony in a form of prayer. Jesus himself prayed the lament Psalms on the cross. Yet in many lament Psalms, the psalmists did not end their prayer with lament, but by giving praise and glory to God.
7. The *methods* of Christian mission are characterised by the love of Christ and the model of his self-sacrifice.
8. The suffering and even martyrdom of witnesses serve the *goal* of mission – God’s *doxa*.
9. The martyrdom of witnesses to the faith is not the end of God’s mission. In his sovereignty, God is able to use it for the *building of his kingdom* by giving faith-inspiring qualities to martyrdom, which may lead to the growth of his church.
10. Witness for Christ and work for his kingdom and his justice need to be upheld even and particularly in the face of resistance, oppression, persecution and martyrdom.
11. Christian witness is also *directed towards the persecutors* of Christians and is expressed by loving one’s enemies, renouncing vengeance and pleading with God to forgive them.
12. *Unity and solidarity* within the body of Christ in the face of persecution are part of his mission and of the missionary witness to a non-Christian world.
13. The mission of his church on earth will be *fulfilled* at the *parousia* of Christ, joyfully anticipated by his church. Her oppression,

persecution and martyrdom will not merely come to an end. Rather, all of these will be eclipsed by the fully revealed glory and healing presence of God who will reward his faithful witnesses, and whose praise will then sound unhindered.

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

# A THEOLOGY OF MARTYRDOM

Agne Nordlander

## Introduction

Is there anything worth dying for? The post-modern person shakes her head, disillusioned and sceptical at the thought of meaning in life, of a universal truth, objective worth, a good world order, or a god. Islamic suicide bombers on the television screen assert the contrary view with their own and their victims' bodies blown to bits. The twentieth century has, without comparison, been the Christian Church's greatest period of martyrdom. More Christians have been killed for their faith in this century (c 45 million) than were killed between the years 33 and 1899 (c 25 million), according to David Barrett, the statistical expert for the global church.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, no earlier century has seen so many people come to Christian faith. Todd M. Johnson and Peter Crossing calculate the number of Christian martyrs during the year 2013 at 160,000.<sup>2</sup> They are using 'martyr' in a very broad sense of Christians who die for the sake of their religious convictions and in their struggle for justice and human rights, including substantial estimated percentages and numbers of Christian victims of general civil conflicts. Religious, political, and ethnic factors work together here in a complex way.

With a feeling of distaste, we in the western Protestant church tend to sweep this information under the rug as quickly as possible. In some instances it is only Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch who openly report about the religious persecution of Christians. The idea that a congregation is victorious through suffering no longer has a part in our conception of Christianity. 'Sacrifice' is a word that is disappearing from our theological vocabulary. It has been displaced by 'well-being', at any price. The western church runs the risk of becoming an exponent for a spirituality that is solely interested in its own pursuit of well-being.

On the other hand, the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches have always had a developed theology of martyrdom. Similarly, the Anabaptist churches in the West and the pietist groups within the Protestant Folk and

---

<sup>1</sup> David B. Barrett, Georg T. Kurian and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia, Second edition, Volume 1* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Todd M. Johnson and Peter Crossing, 'Christianity 2014: Independent Christianity and Slum Dwellers', in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 1.38, No. 1, January 2014, 29.

State churches have experienced persecution at various times and thus have made a place for both reporting on and theological reflection about martyrdom. And not least, information from international missions has brought suffering for the sake of Christ to our attention. In Scandinavia, organisations such as 'Light for the Peoples', 'Open Doors', and 'Friends of the Martyred Church', often in co-operation with the World Evangelical Alliance, have provided ongoing information about and reflection on the persecution of Christianity in different parts of the world.

### **Building Blocks in a Theology of Martyrdom**

Broadly speaking, one must admit that within the sphere of our Protestant culture, there is precious little well-thought-out theology of suffering for the sake of Christ and of martyrdom. In contrast, from the quickly growing church of the southern hemisphere, we have an enormously strong witness to persecution and suffering for the sake of the faith. They have actual experiences of martyrdom. This chapter will attempt to present a theology of martyrdom by addressing two questions. What does the NT say about suffering for the sake of Christ and about martyrdom? What can we learn from church history and from the persecuted church of our own day?

We can begin with some terminological clarifications. The word 'martyr' comes from the Greek word *martus*. It is used in three different senses in the NT. First, the word is originally a judicial term. A witness is summoned as evidence in a legal proceeding in order to confirm the validity of a statement.

Secondly, the word is used in an extended, religious meaning regarding the people of Israel, called as witnesses to the fact that the Lord alone is God. Jesus Christ is presented in John's Gospel as the faithful witness to God and his act of salvation. In the same way, the apostles and other Christians are called as witnesses to Jesus Christ. Their testimony has a historical dimension: they are to bear witness to Jesus' life, his teaching, deeds, and above all to the fact that they met him as the Risen One. In this sense, they are 'eyewitnesses' – their testimony points to the historical foundation for Christian faith. But their testimony also has to do with the theological, spiritual, and existential content in the Jesus narrative. Their testimony to Jesus Christ calls human beings to repent and to believe in the risen Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Finally, this testimony to Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life leads in certain situations to Christian witnesses being put to death. Already in the time of the NT we meet 'blood-witnesses', those who sealed their Christian testimony with their own blood (Acts 22:20; Rev. 2:13; 6:9; 17:6). Stephen is the first Christian martyr in this sense (Acts 7:56-60).

There is no developed 'martyr theology' in the NT, but the various authors contribute various building blocks for constructing one. Let us examine them. We can begin with Jesus' teaching in the Gospels. God's

kingdom stands as the centre of Jesus' message. Jesus shares the OT's perspective on the history of salvation as God's struggle to retake the creation that the enemy has occupied; to set humanity free from imprisonment to sin, death, and evil spiritual powers; and to establish God's good rule. Jesus views this as his calling. He carries out God's commission through his preaching, his healings and exorcisms, but above all through his suffering, his death, and his resurrection. Jesus lives under the divine 'must' in God's plan of salvation.

'Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again' (Mark 8:31). 'For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45). Humanity's greatest problem can be solved only through Jesus' substitutionary death. The NT authors are closely united on this point. They are also united in regarding Jesus' death on a cross, so horrifying from a human viewpoint, as an expression of God's love. 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son' (John 3:16). And in Christ, God himself is fully present and participatory in that suffering. 'In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself' (2 Cor. 5:19). Christian martyr theology simply cannot be understood apart from the drama and mystery of reconciliation. It is at this point that it is different from Jewish and, above all, Islamic understandings of martyrdom.

### Participating in Christ's Suffering

Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection constitute something completely unique, a once-for-all event of cosmic and eternal dimensions. It opens the door to a new world, a new humanity, a new fellowship with God, and a new view of God. The event does not need to be repeated. But one can only have a part in this new life through imitating Christ in taking up one's cross and following Jesus. Discipleship, confession, suffering, and imitation of Christ belong inextricably together. 'When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die,' Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*.<sup>3</sup> 'Christ is only Christ as the suffering and rejected One, and in the same way, the disciple is only a disciple as suffering and rejected, as crucified with Christ.'<sup>4</sup>

God has selected and meted out a cross that is appropriate for each and every one of us. 'God may give someone a great suffering because he believes that a person will be able to bear it, as for example the grace of martyrdom. But he prevents someone else from taking on more than that person can handle. And yet, it is the same cross,'<sup>5</sup> Bonhoeffer writes. Thus

<sup>3</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 99.

<sup>4</sup> Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 96.

<sup>5</sup> Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 98f.

every baptised and believing Christian has a cross to bear in following Jesus. For some this entails deprivation, that is, ambitions and interests that I must refrain from; for others, scorn, harassment, limitations on freedom; for a third group, severe persecution and death.

But why cannot the Christian life consist solely of joy, peace and security? Why cannot all forms of suffering belong to a Christian's past life? The answer is that for all Christians, as precisely for Jesus, it has to do with the law of the kernel of wheat. 'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. [...] those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life' (John 12:24-25). Bearing fruit is a mission motif in John's Gospel.

People are led to faith through the disciple's self-giving life, his willingness to be deprived and to suffer, and in love to give up his life as a witness. A disciple wins eternal life for himself by dying to the old, self-serving life.

Exactly as in the Gospels, participation in Christ's suffering plays an outstandingly important role in Paul's letters. The basic interpretive key for the entire Christian life, with the help of which we can understand our own life as human beings, is the model Christ gives us with its two corresponding foci: dying and rising. Christ's own destiny, and every believing and baptised person's destiny, can be found entailed in these two words. Thus, the imitation of Christ can, according to Paul, be restated with rubrics of sacramental imitation in baptism, ethical imitation, imitation in suffering, and the imitation of glory.

Suffering endured by Christians is caused by two factors. The first is that even Christians belong to the present evil age, which is characterised by enmity toward God, by sin, death, perishability, evil and illness. When famine, civil war or natural catastrophes ravage a country, both Christians and non-Christians are alike afflicted. Sickness and both bodily and mental breakdown affect both believers and unbelievers.

The second factor is a specifically Christian suffering that comes with the struggle against the three enemies of the devil, the world, and our own flesh, and that meets us – among other things – when we seek to carry out our missional and evangelising commission. It is in this sphere that union with Christ in baptism and faith is a union with ongoing suffering. I have been crucified with Christ (Gal. 6:14). I have been nailed with Christ on this cross and I find myself in this condition still. In one sense I am still hanging with Christ on this cross. Thus I have a genuine part in Christ's suffering. At the same time, I have risen with Christ in baptism and belong to the coming new age. Christ's resurrection life lives in me. The Spirit has been given to me as a gift, a guarantee, and as power. Thus I also have a genuine part in Christ's comfort (2 Cor. 1:5).

Indeed, Paul can even speak of the joy to be had in suffering for the sake of Christ (Phil. 2:17), and in Philippians 1:29 he refers to suffering in discipleship as a great privilege. Even Peter encourages the faithful to

rejoice that they have a part in suffering with Christ: ‘...so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed’ (1 Pet. 4:13).

The joy in martyrdom rests in the knowledge that I live in a real fellowship with Christ, but also that my suffering helps others to be rescued. It is this that Paul is thinking of in Colossians 1:24: ‘I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.’ Once again it is the mission charge that is in focus: to live in mission in order to make Jesus known, believed, loved, and obeyed. And it is so important that it is worth suffering for with joy, indeed, even worth dying for.

### **The Book of Revelation – The Martyrdom Book**

The book of Revelation, also called ‘The Martyrdom Book’, similar to the Gospels and the Pauline letters, makes a very considered theological contribution to the theology of martyrdom. It does so in the same way as it offers a very profound Trinitarian theology, a highly developed Christology and philosophy of history, deep reflection on the presence of evil and the demonic in the world, as well as the Bible’s most detailed description of the full manifestation of the Kingdom of God. What then is new in Revelation’s perspective on martyrdom, compared with the perspective of the Gospels and Paul? My answer to this question largely follows Richard Bauckham’s interpretation in *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*.<sup>6</sup>

Christ’s task in Revelation is to establish God’s dominion upon the earth. This salvific work entails both judgement and deliverance. The victory of the Lamb and his followers plays a central role in this deliverance. The victory takes place in three stages.<sup>7</sup> First, the Lamb, Jesus Christ, has conquered on Golgotha. That is the foundational liberating act. But Jesus the Messiah has won the victory over the evil powers, the evil trinity of Satan and the two beasts, not through military force, but rather through self-giving love and through a substitutionary sacrificial death.

The decisive conflict has therefore already been won, but now the Lamb’s followers are called to continue the conflict in order to win their victory in a second phase. Then, with Jesus’ return, the final victory of the Lamb and his followers is secured. Thus the third phase is attained, the full manifestation of God’s kingdom. In this conflict against the evil powers, Jesus as the trustworthy witness (Rev. 1:5; 3:14) plays a central role, but his followers also are described as witnesses and even as blood-witnesses (Rev. 2:13; 11:3; 17:6).<sup>8</sup> It cost Jesus his life in order to bear a trustworthy

<sup>6</sup> Richard J. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 67.

<sup>8</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 72-73.

witness about God; it will also cost his followers their life in order to be faithful witnesses. The satanic resistance is as strong as this, and it is allotted a larger role in Revelation than in any other part of the NT. There is no possible compromise between God's truth and the beast's lie. This is an insight characteristic of the biblical prophetic tradition (cf. e.g. 1 Kings 18:21).<sup>9</sup>

Bauckham does not hold that the texts about martyrdom are to be understood as a literal prediction that every believing Christian is to be killed, but he does think they require that every believing Christian must be prepared to die if the situation calls for it.<sup>10</sup>

Martyrdom has two positive effects. In part, the believers themselves win eternal life through their faithful Christian witness and thus avoid the final judgement (Rev. 7:13-17).<sup>11</sup> And in part they constitute the Lamb's army, which by its witness in word, deed, and death by martyrdom will lead the world to regret and to faith (Rev. 11:1-19). In other words, God's people, the church, have been ransomed from among all nations (Rev. 5:9) in order to bear a prophetic witness to all nations before the final judgement comes.<sup>12</sup>

Bauckham bases his interpretation on Rev. 11:13, where nine-tenths of the city's population 'gave glory to the God of heaven',<sup>13</sup> on Rev. 14:6, regarding the angel with the eternal gospel for all nations;<sup>14</sup> on Rev. 14:15, with the positive picture of harvest<sup>15</sup> as well as on Rev. 15:1-4, with the victors' song, praising God because all nations will come and worship God<sup>16</sup>. He reads these texts as support for the conversion of the nations in the final phase of history. As this good ripening takes place in the final event, a corresponding evil ripening is also taking place. John speaks both of a universal conversion of the nations and of a universal enmity toward God leading to final judgement. But in this final battle it is the church's witness in martyrdom that wins the nations for God.<sup>17</sup> It is in this way that the Kingdom of God comes!

### Martyrdom and God's People

Thus the NT's theology of martyrdom consists of three building blocks: discipleship as following Christ, participation in Jesus' death and resurrection through faith and baptism, and martyrdom as the means of

<sup>9</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 93.

<sup>10</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 93-94.

<sup>11</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 79-80.

<sup>12</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 87-88.

<sup>13</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 86-87.

<sup>14</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 94.

<sup>15</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 95.

<sup>16</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 101.

<sup>17</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 102-104.



bringing the nations to repentance. The NT authors assume at the outset that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. They subscribe to an exclusivist religio-theological concept, to use modern terminology. Christianity cannot sacrifice giving this exclusive 'yes' to Christ without denying itself. From this it necessarily follows that believers will be ready to die for their faith and to be eager to win all others to the Christian faith. Passivity on this point must be branded as a compassionless indifference toward humanity's salvation.

The NT view of the church as God's people, the body of Christ, and the communion of saints, constitutes the fourth building block. The Holy Spirit as the one who gives strength to endure suffering can be regarded as the fifth building block. Martyrdom is therefore seen in the early church as the fruit of the Spirit and as a gracious gift of God.

But how, according to the NT, is the Christian faith to be spread, and with what means? Here it is important to understand the Bible's imagery in the right way. The book of Revelation, for example, uses apocalyptic, militaristic and mythological imagery, which is very popular in today's youth culture. Just consider Tolkien's Ring saga, science fiction and fantasy literature. It is very important to explain in precisely this context that the Lamb's and the martyrs' army, which conquers Satan and the two beasts, is engaged in a spiritual battle. It is a battle carried out with the witness to Jesus' sacrificial death and victorious resurrection in the power of the Holy Spirit, and with Jesus' love as its driving force. It is not fought with coercion or economic haggling, not with violence or weaponry in any sense whatsoever, not with manipulation or hate-filled propaganda, and not in fanaticism or blind obedience. Jesus and Stephen, who died with words of forgiveness for their executioners, provide the model for how genuine martyrs die.

### **Learning from Church History and Today's Persecuted Church**

What then can we learn from church history and from the persecuted church of today? A well-developed theology of martyrdom cannot ignore the fact that the Christian church, in the name of faith, has itself persecuted and put to death those with different views. Many of the people counted as Christian martyrs in Barrett's statistics for the period 33-1899 were in fact killed by representatives of the great churches! The religious war in Europe in the seventeenth century is regarded as one of the causes of western civilisation's de-Christianisation! Armed power, violence and compulsion in all forms has been used by the church – we need think only of Charlemagne's mission by sword, of the Crusades, or the Inquisition's fight against heretics, and so on. In the light of these ecclesiastical transgressions against the NT's guidelines for mission – not to mention crimes against human rights – the alliance between state and church from the time of

Emperor Constantine is seen as disastrous. Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

There are therefore many attitudes and alliances that the church must avoid if it is to represent a biblical theology of martyrdom. This means the repudiation of all forms of fanaticism and of any establishing of state or national churches, which always sooner or later tend to become politically governed. Church and state must be kept separate from one another. In the western hemisphere, this is so because the church there tends to be reduced to a spiritual defender of whatever is politically correct for the moment, and thus loses more and more a biblical and prophetic substance. In the southern hemisphere, it is so because ethnically insulated churches are drawn into ethnic antagonisms. The battle for the Kingdom of God and for one's own ethnic culture and political power thus easily become the same thing.

In our day, an obvious broadening of the concept of martyrdom has come about. In the early church, martyrs identified themselves with Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. They chose death rather than deny Jesus Christ as their saviour and ethical guide. They risked their lives in daring pioneer missions. Today we also call them martyrs who, in their identification with Christ's life and as a consequence of their faith in Christ, have died in the battle for human rights and justice. Martyrdom has both a religious and a political side. We can think of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Gudina Tumsa (former General Secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus), and Archbishop Oscar Romero.

Many theological questions demand attention here. How are we to understand the church's prophetic calling in the political debates about society? How are we to keep a critical distance from political ideology? How are we to avoid defending and resorting to violence in order to accomplish what we regard as a more just society? What does faithfulness toward Christ actually mean in this arena?

### ***Ecclesia Militans in China***

What then can we in the western world learn from the *ecclesia militans*? Chinese church leaders from the house church network, but also some from the Three-Self Church, interpret the last fifty years of suffering and persecution in this way:

First of all, this is God's way of cleansing his people, of making the church independent of foreign support, of making the church a lay-led movement, and of making the church dependent on the power of the Spirit.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Bob Fu, 'Persecution and Christian Apologetics: The Dynamic Growth of the Chinese Church' (Colaw Lecture Series at OKWU, 19th-21st March 2003), 6-7. See

Moreover, persecution and suffering have led to a deepened maturity and Christian discipleship. Over and over again, believers have been faced with the choice between denying their faith, bearing a false witness against fellow Christians, accepting the party's Maoist ideology or going to prison, to work camps, torture and death. Only the Holy Spirit is able to give strength, hope and courage to confess the faith in such situations.<sup>19</sup>

One could even say that suffering is training in obedience. One person learned obedience through suffering (Heb. 5:8). In prison, one learned to give oneself over solely to God's mercy.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, we may draw the conclusion that suffering deepened the Chinese Christians' union with Christ. They learned more and more what it means to be crucified with Christ. But they experienced not merely suffering and pain in following Christ, but also the power of his resurrection through the Holy Spirit, and they saw how Christ overcame the hatred and opposition of their tormentors and led them to faith.<sup>21</sup>

The martyrs in the history of the church and in the persecuted church of today remind us of what it means to be a faithful witness for Jesus Christ. They remind us also of the true character of corruptive powers and of the price that must be paid so that the nations can be brought to faith in Jesus Christ, the saviour of the world, and so that the Kingdom of God can be established. Church Father Tertullian's dictum retains its validity even today: 'The blood of the martyrs is the church's best seed. In dying we overcome.'

Copyrighted Material

---

also Kim-kwong Chan, 'Religious Freedom and Christian Mission: The People's Republic of China' in this volume.

<sup>19</sup> Fu, 'Persecution and Christian Apologetics', 7-9.

<sup>20</sup> Fu, 'Persecution and Christian Apologetics', 9.

<sup>21</sup> Fu, 'Persecution and Christian Apologetics', 9-10.

# MISSION, PERSECUTION AND MARTYRDOM IN THE EARLY CHURCH

James J. Stamoolis

‘The blood of the Martyrs is the church’s best seed’ Tertullian (c 160-c 225)<sup>1</sup>

This famous quotation sums up the common view of the early church. Christians refused to sacrifice to the Roman civic deities, and their heroic witness only increased the numbers of Christ-followers. While it is true that the Christians’ courageous witness was a powerful evangelistic tool, the story is more nuanced. Another prevalent conception is that persecution was continuous up to the time of Constantine – which was not the case. The story is far more complex than Tertullian’s statement would suggest.

## The Missionary Expansion of the Church

We really know tantalisingly little about the expansion of the church in the early centuries. Eusebius records ‘... the holy apostles of our Saviour were scattered across the whole world. Thomas, according to tradition, was allotted Parthia, Andrew Scythia, and John Asia...’<sup>2</sup> W.H.C. Frend notes: ‘The story of the church’s mission in this period, however, is obscure.’<sup>3</sup>

Even the work of Paul and his associates is not fully known. Other missionaries, unknown to us, carried the good news. The geographical representation at church councils demonstrates the Gospel’s spread both in the Roman world and the regions beyond.<sup>4</sup> Because of the lack of information, most historians extrapolate on the materials in the New Testament to explain church expansion in the first century. Several factors contribute to this paucity of documentation.

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Apology*, chapter 50. A convenient translation is found in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. III, by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds), (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 55.

<sup>2</sup> Paul L. Maier, *Eusebius: The Church History: A New Translation with Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1999), 93.

<sup>3</sup> W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984), 126.

<sup>4</sup> There is, for example, the tradition that the Apostle Thomas preached the Gospel in India – and the churches of South India accept this as evidence of their apostolic founding. Stephen Neill thinks the Thomas’ story could be true because of corroborating archaeological evidence and that sea trade round Arabia to India existed in the first century AD. Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (London: Penguin, 1987), 44-46.

The first is the relative unimportance of the identity of the original messengers to later generations. Not that missionaries were insignificant but as the church grew, the founders became more remote, especially if they were not apostles.<sup>5</sup> Many were not professional preachers but ordinary Christians who were not afraid to share their faith. Furthermore, even if they were documented, the records were lost or destroyed over the course of time.

There may be another reason why names of missionaries were not preserved. The eschatological passages in the New Testament contain an imminent expectation of Christ's return.<sup>6</sup> This affected their behaviour as they expected the present evil age to be swept away. As a consequence there was less focus on the impermanent since it would be changed in the twinkling of an eye.

Along with the expansion of the church, there was the rise of heretical movements such as Gnosticism. Popular in the urban centres of the Eastern part of the empire, Gnosticism is little known for two reasons. In the first place, the church wiped out any traces of the heresy.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, the Gnostics themselves were reluctant to commit their teaching to writing since putting it into material form would corrupt the spiritual teaching.<sup>8</sup> Another heretic, Marcion, dissatisfied with the God of the Old Testament as not in keeping with his concept of a loving god, literally cut out portions of the Bible.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> 'For the agents of the church's spread our documents are very unsatisfactory... We must, therefore, be prepared for the spread of the faith by means unfamiliar to us. It is also certain that Christianity won converts through more than one type of person. We must not expect to discover that the gains were exclusively or even mainly through one class or profession.' Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of The Expansion of Christianity, Volume 1: The First Five Centuries* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 114.

<sup>6</sup> This is particularly true of the letters to the Thessalonians, though Paul's later letters indicate that he believed he would die first.

<sup>7</sup> This is also true of attacks against the Christians. Celsus' reasoned attack against the Christian faith is found only in Origen's rebuttal: '... as Henry Chadwick says, "We must... conclude that we know nothing of Origen's opponent except what can be inferred from the text of Origen himself" – and that means we know nothing whatsoever about him, neither the dates of his life, nor the philosophical school... nor the places where he lived and died.' Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Excellent Empire: The Fall of Rome and the Triumph of the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1987), 16.

<sup>8</sup> Cf 'Early Christian History – Movements: Gnosticism': [www.earlychristianhistory.info/gnostic.html](http://www.earlychristianhistory.info/gnostic.html)

<sup>9</sup> Marcion (d. c 160) believed that only Paul understood the contrast between law and grace, and he admitted only the Pauline epistles and a heavily edited Gospel of Luke to his canon.

The variations of the Gospel message also testify to its dissemination. Tertullian appears to have been a convert to Montanism.<sup>10</sup> Described as a movement of the Holy Spirit, the adherents advocated a deeper Christian experience. Martyrdom was the ultimate act of devotion and motivated some Christians' response to persecution.<sup>11</sup> Tertullian considered martyrdom to be a second baptism that washed away all sin.<sup>12</sup>

In the light of the accusations levelled against Christians, the question arises as to how the church grew. Michael Green speaks of 'gossiping the Gospel' house to house.<sup>13</sup> Rodney Stark uses a sociological model to explain the expansion of the church. The superior morality of the Christians and the way young women were protected provided an alternative to the debauchery of society.<sup>14</sup>

### Persecution

The Christians' uncompromising stand on the Lordship of Christ and their unwillingness to sacrifice to the Roman gods led to conflicts with the authorities. Furthermore, it was this unwillingness to acknowledge the Roman gods that caused Christians to be denounced as atheists. This is not, however, the only reason as persecution arose also from opposition by the populace to Christians and their message.

The Romans crucified Jesus, but persecution came from the Jews because Jesus disturbed the status quo. Unrest in Judea and Galilee was a threat to ruling religious groups (cf. John 11:48). Hostility and envy was directed against Jesus (Mt 27:18, Mark 14:10, John 12:10-11) and his followers. The disciples had barred the doors for fear of the Jews (John 20:19). Stephen was stoned for blasphemy (Acts 6:11-12).

<sup>10</sup> 'The rigourist strain in Tertullian and the opposition it evoked in Carthage, took him into Montanism, with its heightened eschatological expectations, its emphasis upon the immediacy of the Spirit and ecstatic prophecy, its asceticism and, at least by implication, a perfectionist... doctrine of the Church.' Article on Tertullian, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone (eds), (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 1591-92.

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Christian leaders had to prohibit a rush to martyrdom among the more enthusiastic believers. Origen was stopped from joining his father in martyrdom by his mother hiding his clothes. *Eusebius: The Church History*, 207-208.

<sup>12</sup> W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to the Donatus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981), 359.

<sup>13</sup> In his extremely helpful and thorough study, Michael Green covers the proclamation of the Gospel in the early centuries. He writes of the 'informal missionaries' who '... went everywhere gossiping the Gospel; they did it naturally, enthusiastically, and with the conviction of those who are not paid to say that sort of thing'. *Evangelism in the Early Church* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970), 173.

<sup>14</sup> Cf Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1997).

Then a fire in AD 64 destroyed most of Rome. The populace suspected Nero had started the fire for his own amusement and as an excuse to rebuild the capital. Looking for a someone to blame, Nero settled on the Christians whose morals were viewed with suspicion.<sup>15</sup> The cruelty with which he treated his victims was deplored by the general populace but, as far as is known, no-one professed Christ and joined in being martyred in this persecution.<sup>16</sup>

Roman state religion formed an integral part of civic duties. Sources indicate that while few seemed to actually believe in the gods, participation in the ritual was seen as evidence of good citizenship. Some Christians balked at the ritual which included either offering sacrifice or burning incense. Others offered worship as an act of patriotism, considering it a civic duty. Furthermore, the practice was not universally observed and lax government officials did not energetically promote it or systematically count the participants. Some conveniently absented themselves, while others paid a fine in lieu of sacrifice.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> 'But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed.' Tacitus, *The Annals, Book XV*. Translated by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb. <http://classics.mit.edu/Tacitus/annals.11.xv.html>

<sup>16</sup> Admittedly, we don't know if there were conversions. Frend has a good discussion on the persecution and the hostility towards the Christians as well as what was regarded as the conditions for a religion receiving legitimate status in Rome. W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, 160-71.

<sup>17</sup> 'The Decian persecution made a very sharp impact on the churches. The requirement was for all Romans... to attend sacrifices... and then obtain a certificate that they had done so. Some of these certificates survive in Egypt...' Paul McKechnie, *The First Christian Centuries: Perspectives on the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), 131.

The Christians' non-participation in many aspects of Roman life such as the theatre and the arena marked them as different. Christians, however, were not persecuted for belonging to an alternative religion as there were many different religions, some of which had secret or private rites to which only the initiated could be admitted. Since the Eucharistic gathering was barred to all but catechised and baptised members of the Christian community, rumours started to circulate as to what really took place behind closed doors. The testimony of the early apologists attempted to refute these accusations.

Their appeals were directed to the authorities, not as petitions for relief from persecution but as an explanation and defence of the Christian faith. Justin Martyr (c 100-c 165) appealed to the emperor Titus for fairness based on the Roman justice system.

For we... beg that you pass judgement, after an accurate and searching investigation, not flattered by prejudice or by a desire of pleasing superstitious men, nor induced by irrational impulse or evil rumours which have long been prevalent. We demand that the charges against the Christians be investigated, and that if these be substantiated, they be punished as they deserve...<sup>18</sup>

Justin's appeal was for the rights due to all citizens which were being denied to Christians. He also warned the authorities: 'For if, when ye have learned the truth, you do not do what is just, you will be before God without excuse.'<sup>19</sup> Justin demonstrated that the charges levelled against Christians were false and Christians strived to live holy lives. As for the accusation of atheism, Justin boldly declared that the old gods were demons and not to be worshipped. He maintained the God of the Christians to be the true God and gave witness to the Trinity.

Another early apologist, Athenagoras, noted that in the Roman Empire all manner of gods were worshipped. '... different peoples observe different laws and customs; and no one is hindered by law or fear of punishment from devotion to his ancestral ways, even if they are ridiculous.'<sup>20</sup> As he describes some of these customs, one is impressed by the diversity represented. It seems everything was permitted because: 'For you think it impious and wicked to believe in no god at all; and you hold it necessary for everyone to worship the gods he pleases, so that they may be kept from wrongdoing by fear of the divine.'<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Justin Martyr, *The First Apology of Justin*, chapters II & III. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 163.

<sup>19</sup> Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, 163.

<sup>20</sup> 'A Plea Regarding Christians by Athenagoras, the Athenian a Philosopher and a Christian', in *Early Christian Fathers*, Cyril C. Richardson (ed), (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1996), 300. All that is known of this Athenagoras is that he was a philosopher in Athens who had converted to the Christian faith. His 'A Plea Regarding Christians' was written late AD 176 or early 177.

<sup>21</sup> Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, 301.



But this toleration did not extend to Christians.

But you have not cared for us who are called Christians in this way [i.e. with toleration]. Although we do no wrong but, as we shall show, are of all men most religiously and rightly disposed toward God and your empire, you allow us to be harassed, plundered and persecuted, the mob making war on us only because of our name. We venture, therefore, to state our case before you. From what we have to say you will gather that we suffer unjustly and contrary to all law and reason. Hence, we ask you to devise some measures to prevent our being the victims of false accusers.<sup>22</sup>

The heart of Athenagoras' case is that the Christians were good citizens and therefore a benefit to the empire. There was a provision in Roman law which awarded to their accusers part of the possessions of those unmasked as criminals.<sup>23</sup> So added to envy of Christians was the motive of financial gain for those who denounced them to the Roman authorities.<sup>24</sup>

While persecution was neither constant nor for the most part universal, it did grow more severe as the church was perceived a threat to the empire. Nero had made Christians scapegoats; this became a hallmark of the subsequent persecutions.

About the fifth century, some Christian writers compared the persecutions with the ten plagues in Egypt.<sup>25</sup> Augustine rejected this view,

<sup>22</sup> Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, 301.

<sup>23</sup> In discussing the martyrs of Alexandria, Eusebius tells that the crowd 'rushed in a group to the houses of the godly and attacked, plundered, and looted their own neighbors...' *The Church History*, 235. See also J.G. Davies, *The Early Christian Church: A History of the Its First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), 115ff. There was some relief: 'The background to the procedure Hadrian lays down is that the property of people convicted of capital crimes was forfeited to the state, and informers received a share – hence the "opportunity for plunder"... What is new, however, is that Hadrian puts informers at risk: the penalty for falsely accusing someone of Christianity is to be a fine in excess of the amount the informer would have gained on the conviction of the accused.' Paul McKechnie, *The First Christian Centuries*, 117. Origen's family, among many others, was plunged into dire straits because of his father's martyrdom and subsequent confiscation of their property.

<sup>24</sup> Consider Haman who hated and envied the Jew, Mordecai, and whose edict, signed by Ahasuerus gave the enemies of the Jews not only the right to kill them but to seize their possessions as plunder (Est. 3:13).

<sup>25</sup> 1. Persecution under Nero (c 64-68). Traditional martyrdoms of Peter and Paul.  
2. Persecution under Domitian (r. 81-96)  
3. Persecution under Trajan (112-117). Christianity is outlawed but Christians are not sought out.  
4. Persecution under Marcus Aurelius (r 161-180). Martyrdom of Polycarp.  
5. Persecution under Septimius Severus (202-10). Martyrdom of Perpetua.  
6. Persecution under Decius (250-251). Christians are actively sought out by requiring public sacrifice. Option to buy certificates (*libelli*) instead of sacrificing. Martyrdoms of bishops of Rome, Jerusalem and Antioch.

saying it was a human invention and did not count the earlier persecutions of Christ and the apostles.

I do not think, indeed, that what some have thought or may think is rashly said or believed, that until the time of the Antichrist, the Church of Christ is not to suffer any persecutions besides those she has already suffered – that is, *ten* – and the eleventh and last shall be inflicted by Antichrist... For as there were ten plagues in Egypt before the people of God could begin to go out, they think this is to be referred to as showing that the last persecution by Antichrist must be like the eleventh plague, in which the Egyptians... perished in the Red Sea... Yet I do not think persecutions were prophetically signified by what was done in Egypt, however nicely and ingeniously those who think so may seem to have compared the two in detail, not by the prophetic Spirit, but the conjecture of the human mind, which sometimes hits the truth, and sometimes is deceived.<sup>26</sup>

Augustine's sensible approach reminds his readers there were and will be more persecutions. 'And what account do they give of Julian, whom they do not number in the *ten*? Did he not persecute the church, who forbade the Christians to teach or learn liberal letters?'<sup>27</sup> Augustine refers to Julian (332-63) who in spite of the 'victory' of the church under Constantine was trying to breathe life back into the corpse of the ancient Roman civic religion.<sup>28</sup>

Summarising the persecutions of the first three centuries, both the authorities and the populace were offended by the behaviour of Christians. The closed nature of Christian worship gave rise to rumours of incest, orgies and human sacrifice.<sup>29</sup> There were times of relative peace, for example from 211 to 250 and again from 258 to 303. The persecutions

7. Persecution under Valerian (257-259). Martyrdoms of Cyprian of Carthage and Sixtus II of Rome.

8. Persecution under Maximinus the Thracian (235-38).

9. Persecution under Aurelian (r 270-275).

10. Severe persecution under Diocletian and Galerius (303-324). 'Persecution in the Early Church': [www.religionfacts.com/christianity/history/persecution.htm](http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/history/persecution.htm)

<sup>26</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, Book 18:52, cited from The Modern Library edition (New York: Random House, 1950), 663.

<sup>27</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, 664.

<sup>28</sup> 'Atheism [i.e. Christian faith] has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers, and through their care for the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar, and that the Godless Galileans care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them.' Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 37-38. Julian's frustration gives witness to the service that Christians rendered.

<sup>29</sup> This can be explained by the practice of greeting each other with a holy kiss (Rom. 16:16, 1 Cor. 16:20, 2 Cor. 13:12, 1 Thess. 5:26), how the Christians addressed each other as brother and sister, and the words of institution of the Eucharist meal which outsiders could interpret as literal body and blood being consumed.

occurred regionally and so there were areas free from persecution. The church leaders did not require the believers to stay and be martyred but approved flight to avoid persecution. Finally, some Christians compromised and offered worship or bribed officials to obtain release. In later times of distress, when the authorities attempted to confiscate and destroy copies of the Scriptures, there were clergy who turned over Bibles to the authorities. These lapsed Christians, both laity and clergy, presented the church with a problem when they wanted to be reinstated, and were the cause of schismatic and separatist movements. The largest and longest lasting 'pure' movement was the Donatists who refused to reinstate clergy who had surrendered the Scriptures to the authorities during the Diocletian persecution.<sup>30</sup>

### Martyrdom

The stories of those who did not yield to pressure to deny Christ form some of the most precious of all Christian literature outside of the Scripture.<sup>31</sup> Eusebius and others writers extol these confessors of the faith.<sup>32</sup> Roman Catholic hagiography is replete with stories of saints who sealed their testimony with their lives. Compilations of lists of martyrs from Reformation times included the early church witnesses in part to show the continuity of faith with the earliest Christians and in part to demonstrate that the true testimony to Christ will involve persecution.<sup>33</sup> This purpose is borne out by a comment in the introduction to *Martyr's Mirror*: 'Men are more easily converted by good examples than by good teachings, because examples are more impressive.'<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> The Donatist movement had linguistic and social class elements as well. Cf W.H.C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).

<sup>31</sup> Certainly, the martyrdoms recorded in Scripture are also precious reading. The roll call of faith in Hebrews 11 speaks for all martyrs of all times where we read the commendation 'of whom the world was not worthy' (v. 38).

<sup>32</sup> Nearly all the early Church Fathers mention the martyrs. See the citation below from Augustine, *The City of God*, on the virtues of the martyrs.

<sup>33</sup> For the later writers, persecution was not at the hand of self-confessed pagans, but at the hand of professing Christians who were, in their own minds, defending correct doctrine. There is a parallel with the treatment of schismatics in pre-Reformation times by the orthodox. Conversely, those now viewed as heretics, when they were in power, deposed and exiled those now regarded as orthodox.

<sup>34</sup> Thieleman J. van Braght, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs' Mirror of the Defenseless Christians Who Baptized Only upon Confession of Faith, and Who Suffered and Died for the Testimony of Jesus, Their Saviour, From the Time of Christ to the Year AD 1660*, translated from the Dutch by Joseph F. Stohm (Scottsdale, PA: The Herald Press, 1950), 15. Braght was an Anabaptist and his work is an apology for the movement and an explanation of the persecution endured

Some scholars believe there were exaggerations or even the creation of martyr stories for the benefit of the faithful.<sup>35</sup> Even the early Church Fathers view with reservation some of the accounts. Each martyr, however, is known to God as seen in his concern for and comfort of martyrs (Rev. 6: 9-11). This passage could be referring to those who died during the persecution of Domitian. If Revelation is predictive, John could have foreseen in compacted form the persecutions of Christians over the centuries.<sup>36</sup>

There are three main points which arise from the experience of the church during the first three centuries before the official recognition of Christianity by Constantine.

The first is that those who endured persecution rather than recant their faith impressed their hearers with a powerful witness to the reality of Christ. Their witness continues as their stories are retold in each generation. Polycarp resisted the entreaties of friends to flee and the appeals by Roman officials to deny Christ. 'For eighty-six years I have been his servant, and he has never done me wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?'<sup>37</sup> Polycarp's death, Eusebius relates, 'is particularly remembered and spoken of by all, even by the heathen.'<sup>38</sup>

Perpetua, a young mother, was put to death in AD 203 in Carthage. 'The Passion of Perpetua' is one of the gems among early Christian literature. ... Her father tried everything to make her recant... But she remained firm, and went with dignity and courage to her death. The effect of such devotion to Christ can well be imagined.<sup>39</sup>

Justin Martyr relates in his first *Defence* stories of others who were martyred. One is of a woman who was converted after having lived a sensuous life. As her husband, who indulged in all manner of perversions,

---

by the Anabaptists by connecting them with the history of persecution from the beginning of the church.

<sup>35</sup> 'Even more difficult, however, has been a rational assessment of the *Acta Martyrum*. Hundreds of *Acta* were composed in the fourth and fifth centuries in honour of martyrs, the anniversaries of whose deaths were celebrated in the Churches... the historian's task is to decide whether any kernel of truth underlies these stereotyped and florid discourses.' W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, xi-xii. Frend places the concept of martyrdom in the context of the Jewish antecedents. A more sceptical view is found in Candida Moss, *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians invented a Story of Martyrdom* (New York: Harper Collins, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> Some argue that the number of Christian martyred in the twentieth century around the world exceeds the number martyred in all the preceding centuries.

<sup>37</sup> *Eusebius: A History of the Church*, 149. Eusebius goes into great detail on Polycarp's martyrdom.

<sup>38</sup> *A History of the Church*, 151.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 177. For a fuller account, including the historical background, see Joyce E. Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

refused to accept Christ, she decided to divorce him. He accused her before the authorities of being a Christian. Unable to attack his wife, he turned to attacking those who taught her Christian doctrine.

He had a centurion friend arrest Ptolemy and ask him one question only: Was he a Christian? Ptolemy, a lover of truth, confessed he was. ... Finally the man was brought before Urbicius and asked as before: Was he a Christian? He confessed it. When Urbicius ordered his execution, a certain Lucius, also a Christian, protested this unreasonable verdict... Urbicius merely replied, 'You seem to be a Christian yourself, Lucius.' And when Lucius answered, 'I certainly am,' he ordered his execution also. Then a third man also came forward and was sentenced to the same punishment.<sup>40</sup>

The terror of death, even a cruel death in the arena, did not deter Christians from martyrdom. It is not known how many were converted by seeing Christians die for their faith, but martyrs facing death fearlessly produced an effect on the spectators.

A second point to note is that their conviction of the reality of heaven made these martyrs able to face execution. It is one thing to face death bravely; soldiers have done this throughout the ages. It is quite another matter to be tortured both before being brought to the place of execution and there suffering an agonisingly slow and painful death.

These Christians had understood Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4 and especially, from verse 16: 'Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For this slight, momentary affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory...' Where this reality of what is eternal is missing, there are few, if any, martyrs.

The third main observation concerns the rise of the veneration of the relics of martyrs. There are Biblical examples of what appear to be miracles connected with relics.<sup>41</sup> Christians were denied the body of Polycarp because of a concern that his disciples might cease worshipping the 'crucified one' and start worshipping Polycarp. After his body was burned, his disciples gathered up his bones –

as being more precious than the most exquisite jewels, and more purified than gold, and deposited them in a fitting place, whither, being gathered together, as opportunity is allowed us, with joy and rejoicing, the Lord shall grant us to celebrate the anniversary of his martyrdom, both in memory of those who

---

<sup>40</sup> Eusebius: *A History of the Church*, 155.

<sup>41</sup> In 2 Kings 13:20, the death and burial of Elisha is recorded. In the next verse, during a subsequent burial, the mourners hastily cast the deceased into the grave of Elisha to elude a band of marauding Moabites. 'And when the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood up on his feet' (2 Kings 13:21). In Ephesus during Paul's ministry there were dramatic healings. 'God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out' (Acts 19:11-12).

have already finished their course, and for the exercising and preparation of those yet to walk in their steps.<sup>42</sup>

Augustine relates the miracles connected with the relics of Stephen which he knows about and has observed. After providing many details about the healing and restoration back to life of individuals who were in contact with items that had been placed at the shrine of the martyr, Augustine complains that he has not space to provide more cases.

What am I to do? I am so pressed by the promise of finishing this work that I cannot record all the miracles I know; and doubtless several of our adherents, when they read what I have narrated, will regret that I have omitted so many which they, as well as I, certainly know.<sup>43</sup>

If the work of the Holy Spirit in proclaiming Christ continues, there is no reason to doubt Augustine's testimony as to the power of God. And make no mistake, Augustine makes it plain that –

... we do not build temples, and ordain priests, rites and sacrifices for these same martyrs; for they are not our gods, but their God is our God. Certainly we honour their reliquaries, as the memorials of holy men of God who strove for the truth even to the death of their bodies, that the true religion might be made known, and false and fictitious religions be exposed.<sup>44</sup>

Augustine's comments notwithstanding, it is easy to see how in popular imagination and then in dogma, the veneration of relics became an abuse and substitute for the preaching of the true faith.<sup>45</sup>

In a brilliant study of the art of the Catacombs of Rome, Greg Athnos demonstrates that the early Christians made the resurrection prominent. Athnos points out that one does not see crosses depicted in the artwork.<sup>46</sup> It is important to remember that the early church did not focus on the process of martyrdom but on the resurrection to eternal life, the fruit of martyrdom.

## Conclusion

Merely examining the history of the early church or, for that matter, the church at any period in her history, is not sufficient. We must ask what lessons can be learned from the experience of our sisters and brothers to inform our lives. The period examined above is particularly instructive as believers in many countries, even where there has been a Christian

<sup>42</sup> *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 43.

<sup>43</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, 828.

<sup>44</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, 278.

<sup>45</sup> An interesting study, though not without some difficulties and disputable interpretations, is Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs: Unintended Consequences of Ancient Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>46</sup> Gregory S. Athnos, *The Art of the Roman Catacombs: Themes of Deliverance in the Age of Persecution* (Parker, CO: Outskirts Press, 2011).

tradition, face hostility not unlike the early centuries. The issue of tolerance plays a key role in western societies, particularly in North America. It is considered intolerant to hold an opinion which maintains there is right and wrong on certain moral and religious issues. These issues have evolved and changed over the centuries with Christians on both sides. For example, in the past, some Christians viewed opposition to slavery as interference with and intolerance of their ordered society. In many countries, disrespect shown to symbols of one's country, such as burning a national flag, is considered a criminal offence. The question arises for the Christian: where does one's ultimate allegiance lie? The apostles answered the Sanhedrin that they 'must obey God rather than men' (Acts 4:29). There already exist situations where followers of Christ must make the same declaration and, like the apostles, suffer punishment.

Fairness and justice are not always granted by rulers, since we know that periodic persecution of Christians continued, even under enlightened rulers. Whatever the outcome, a defence of the faith is at the heart of our testimony. Will our age, with its focus on pluralism and diversity and a disdain for Christians, call forth another generation of apologists to defend the rights of Christians in this time? We have the examples of the early confessors and martyrs to provide guidance and encouragement.

# THE ERA OF CONSTANTINE

Maximilian J. Hölzl

At the second Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Evanston, 1954, Edmund Schlink delivered a remarkable address on the main theme 'Christ – the Hope of the World', which was contrary to the prevailing optimistic eschatological expectations and left some delegates and reporters shocked and annoyed.<sup>1</sup> The remarkable thing is how he connected the massive persecution of Christians in his generation with the eschatological way of the church and with biblical ecclesiology: The church has to follow her Lord through suffering to glory. So, it's not the recognised and privileged church, but the powerless, suffering church that is the manifestation of the glory of Christ. Paradoxically, the church which is dying with Christ is the triumphant one. Schlink concedes that church history does not always glorify God, but time and again it is also a scandal. But it is not only the world that will pass away, but also the outward form of the church.<sup>2</sup> In retrospect, it is striking how these statements run parallel to much of the ongoing debate on the proper shape of the church at the end of the era of Christendom and the defects of this long-lasting symbiosis of church, community and state.

## Developments or Changes before the Constantinian Shift

Even without unrealistically idealising the New Testament churches,<sup>3</sup> it is noticeable that the bulk of the Christian movement was barely able to maintain the original course as early as in the post-apostolic age. Murray mentions that 'Christendom', as an alliance of church and state, 'advanced both through startlingly rapid changes' in fourth-century Rome and 'gradual evolution' of 'trends already apparent in previous decades'.<sup>4</sup> The local apostolic churches had been responsible for testing prophetic utterances and 'weighing carefully what is said' (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess.

---

<sup>1</sup> Eugene M. Skibbe, *Edmund Schlink: Bekenner im Kirchenkampf, Lehrer der Kirche, Vordenker der Ökumene* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 102-104.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Schlink, 'Christus – die Hoffnung für die Welt' in Foko Lüpsen (ed), *Evanston Dokumente: Berichte und Reden auf der Weltkirchenkonferenz in Evanston* (Witten, Germany: Luther Verlag, 1954), 135-44.

<sup>3</sup> Cf David J. Bosch, *Witness to the World* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1980), 102.

<sup>4</sup> Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2004), 23.



5:20; 1 John 4:1).<sup>5</sup> Yet already in the *Didache* in the early second century, the prophets were no longer part of the critical judgement of the church. This had serious consequences, as the bishops took over the role of the prophets and, as bishops, they were also removed from the critical judgement of the church.<sup>6</sup> Already the apostolic father Ignatius of Antioch, who was martyred sometime between 98 and 117, justified the unity of the church not in Christ, but in the hierarchical organisation of the bishops – according to Hauss, this was an incorrect approach that led to the papal church.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, according to Ladd, the churches in the New Testament ‘were bound together by no ecclesiastical ties or formal authority; they had a profound sense of oneness’.<sup>8</sup> And the authority of apostles and prophets ‘was spiritual and not appointive or official or legal’.<sup>9</sup> Peters reverses Cyprian’s well-known relationship between church and bishop:

The historic dictum of Cyprian, ‘Where the bishop is, the church is’, finds its reversal in the biblical order, ‘Where the church is, the bishop [overseer] is’, or, ‘There is no bishop [overseer] where there is no church’. The church makes the bishop, and not the bishop the church. The church is God’s priority. It may not be so in human organizations.<sup>10</sup>

Apparently, the challenging transition into the post-apostolic era led to altered understandings of both the unity of the church and the authority placed in her. These modifications had far-ranging effects: as Hinson comments, when Constantine ‘sought to effect unity among Christians’ for the unity of his empire, ‘he set Christianity on the track of persecution that has cast a shadow on its history ever since’. The persecution that Christians ‘had themselves experienced at times’ did ‘not even equal the pain they

---

<sup>5</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT), (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1987), 689-95. F.F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (WBC), Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 125-27. Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John* (WBC), (Waco, TX: Word, 1984), 214-20.

<sup>6</sup> Klaus Wengst, *Schriften des Urchristentums II: Didache (Apostellehre), Barnabasbrief, Zweiter Clemensbrief, Schrift an Diognet* (Darmstadt, Germany: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984), 43, 63.

<sup>7</sup> Friedrich Hauss, *Väter der Christenheit* (Wuppertal, Germany, and Zürich, Switzerland: R. Brockhaus, 1991), 5.

<sup>8</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (London: Lutterworth, 1975), 353.

<sup>9</sup> Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 353. See also Peter Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments, Vol. 1: Grundlegung. Von Jesus zu Paulus* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 201. Cf Michael Hill, *A Sociology of Religion* (London: Heinemann, 1980), 175-76.

<sup>10</sup> George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1972), 220. Cf Maximilian J. Hölzl, ‘Peters, George W.’, in Traugott Bautz (ed), *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, Vol. 35, 1014-1035. See also Leith Anderson: *A Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Bringing Change to your Church to Meet the Challenges of a Changing Society* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1992), 225.

inflicted on non-Christians and even on other Christians as they gave religious sanction to the state's coercive powers'. It is a dubious progress of Constantinianism, that by 'the time of Theodosius I, intolerance had become a public virtue'.<sup>11</sup>

As Baker puts it, 'the period from AD 100 to 325 was perilous for Christianity. Two dangers confronted it: (1) hostility and violence from the pagan government, and (2) corruption and division from within'. Eventually, the 'nature of Christianity had been corrupted by 325. Changes had come in several overlapping areas'. He denotes four of these areas: In the nature of faith; in the nature of the New Testament church; in the nature of ecclesiastical authority; and in the nature of worship.<sup>12</sup>

From a Roman Catholic perspective, however, the changes after the close of the apostolic era were logical and consistent. They were even necessary to combat the Gnostic heresy as well as non-Catholic churches:

As the church spread throughout the Roman Empire, it adapted itself to contemporary social and political structures. By the latter half of the second century, organisational complexification had occurred in the form of synods and councils, and in the emergence of the monarchical episcopacy. The latter was especially linked with the effort to combat certain rigourist movements. Among the major bishop-theologians who fashioned an ecclesiology over against Gnosticism, Novatianism and Donatism were Irenaeus, Cyprian and Augustine respectively.<sup>13</sup>

Remarkably, these ecclesiological modifications were made in the rivalry against concurrent movements – in order to create, as Murray puts it, a 'united church across the Empire undisturbed by nonconformist movements'.<sup>14</sup> The 'old catholic fathers' (180-250), like Irenaeus of Lyons (c 135-200) and Cyprian of Carthage (c 200-258), laid the foundations for the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>15</sup> After the Constantinian shift, the Church Father Augustine of Hippo (354-430) became so instrumental in shaping 'Christendom' that he can be considered a 'pioneer of Christendom' and

<sup>11</sup> E. Glenn Hinson, *The Early Church: Origins to the Dawn of the Middle Ages* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 206-207.

<sup>12</sup> Robert A. Baker, *A Summary of Christian History*, John M. Landers (ed), (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 13, 44.

<sup>13</sup> Richard P. McBrien, 'Church', in Alan Richardson and John Bowden (eds), *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 108-10, here 109. Interestingly, against the Novatians, Cyprian insisted that 'orthodoxy alone is insufficient for union with the one church. True membership requires unity with the bishops on whom the church is founded, with the successors of Peter at their centre', 109.

<sup>14</sup> Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 80.

<sup>15</sup> Armin Sierszyn, *2000 Jahre Kirchengeschichte*, Vol. 1 (Neuhausen-Stuttgart, Germany: Hänssler, 1995), 168. Cf Kurt Aland, *Die Frühzeit der Kirche in Lebensbildern* (Giessen, Germany, and Basel, Switzerland: Brunnen, 1990), 109, 141.

‘its main architect’.<sup>16</sup> According to Diprose, with Cyprian ‘the Catholic church ceased being the universal church and became the Roman Catholic church’. And ‘*orthodoxy* came to mean obedience to the ecclesiastical institution thought to mediate God’s grace through the sacraments’.<sup>17</sup> With the conversion of Constantine, the meaning of the term ‘catholic’ underwent a fundamental change. McGrath observed: ‘By the end of the fourth century, the term *ecclesia catholica* (“the catholic church”) had come to mean “the imperial church” – that is, the only legal religion within the Roman Empire’. Therefore, any ‘other form of belief, including Christian beliefs, which diverged from the mainstream, was declared to be illegal’.<sup>18</sup>

In Brunner’s view, the origin of the Roman Church lies in two facts ‘which reciprocally influenced each other: the sacramental view of salvation and the assertion of formal legal authority’.<sup>19</sup> This development started with the new understanding of the Lord’s Supper as the sacrament of the altar that turned the brotherhood in Christ into the sacramental priestly church.<sup>20</sup> From this change arose a second: into the ‘spiritual organism’ of the Pauline *ekklesia*<sup>21</sup> intruded ‘a quite different kind of order, the formal authority of jurisdiction or power of command’.<sup>22</sup> A third and ‘especially important’ step in the development into the Roman Catholic Church was a new understanding of tradition (cf. *paradosis* in the New Testament) by ‘the coupling of office and tradition’.<sup>23</sup> This is where the Catholic understanding of continuity is involved:

Since Irenaeus the first principle holds good: the guarantors of the trustworthiness of tradition are the bishops; since Cyprian the second principle holds good: the Holy Spirit is bound up with the office, guaranteed by the office, and therefore *that Church cannot err*, which is episcopally organised and guaranteed by the continuity of transmission of office. From

<sup>16</sup> Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 75, 79.

<sup>17</sup> Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel in the Development of Christian Thought* (Rome: Instituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano, 2000), 128.

<sup>18</sup> Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford, UK/Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1994), 424.

<sup>19</sup> Emil Brunner, *Dogmatics III: The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith and the Consummation* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2002 [1962]), 60.

<sup>20</sup> Brunner, *Dogmatics III*, 66. Cf. Gunnar Westin, *Geschichte des Freikirchentums*, 2nd ed. (Kassel, Germany: Oncken, 1958), 17: ‘Fast, but not without protest, the Christian movement was transformed into a sacramentalistic official church since the mid-second century.’ The English translation is mine.

<sup>21</sup> Brunner’s reduction of the early church to the Pauline *ekklesia* could be questioned, but that is beyond the scope of the present analysis. Cf. Christian A. Schwarz, *Die Dritte Reformation: Paradigmenwechsel in der Kirche* (Emmelsbüll, Germany: C & P Verlag, 1993), 19.

<sup>22</sup> Brunner, *Dogmatics III*, 66.

<sup>23</sup> Brunner, *Dogmatics III*, 69.

now on, there is a central interest in unbroken lists of bishops as a proof in the unbroken tradition.<sup>24</sup>

A further highly significant step in the ‘development of the *ekklesia* into the Church’ is what Brunner calls ‘The Perfecting of the Holy Church Institution’.<sup>25</sup> It is the transition from ‘the persecuted ‘confessing Church’ to the popular Church (*Jedermannskirche*) of Constantine’.<sup>26</sup>

### Christendom after the Constantinian Shift

Historians argue over the question of whether the Christian movement needed the historical conversion of Constantine<sup>27</sup> in order that it could develop from a minority religion to a world religion.<sup>28</sup> Neither is there, according to Shenk, any consensus among them ‘as to whether the rise of Constantinianism was a positive development or not’. But historians are in agreement that ‘the church was decisively changed by the decisions taken by emperor Constantine after AD 313’ – decisions ‘that ultimately led to Christianity being recognised as the official religion of the Roman Empire in 380 under Emperor Theodosius I’.<sup>29</sup> Undoubtedly, this change led to the increase of nominal Christianity at the expense of faithfulness.<sup>30</sup> In contrast,

<sup>24</sup> Brunner, *Dogmatics III*, 69. Cf Sierszyn, *2000 Jahre Kirchengeschichte*, Vol. 1, 146-47.

<sup>25</sup> Emil Brunner, *Dogmatik III* (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1960), 90.

<sup>26</sup> Brunner, *Dogmatics III*, 90. For ‘Luther’s urgent desire’ to replace the word ‘Church’ by ‘congregation’, see Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (London: SCM, 1949), 141.

<sup>27</sup> James Stevenson (ed), *A New Eusebius* (London: SPCK, 1974), 298. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Staaten und Großmächte, Probleme staatlicher Ordnung in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Gütersloh, Germany: Mohn, 1960), 104-108. For recent studies on Constantine’s impact on the church, see John D. Roth (ed), *Constantine Revisited: Leithart, Yoder, and the Constantinian Debate* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), and Edward L. Smither (ed), *Rethinking Constantine: History, Theology, and Legacy* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> See Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Urchristliche Mission* (Wuppertal, Germany: R. Brockhaus, 2002), 1497-98. Cf Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 107. Cf Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1997), 7-8: Stark estimates a constant growth rate of 40% per decade during the first several centuries. In AD 250 Christians would make up 1.9% of the estimated 60 million population, in AD 300 10.5%, and in AD 350 56.5%. Cf Craig A. Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 80. Cf also Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (The Pelican History of the Church, 6), (Harmondsworth, UK/Baltimore, MD/Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin, 1964), 46.

<sup>29</sup> Wilbert R. Shenk, ‘New Wineskins for New Wine’, in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 29/2 (2005), 73-79, here 74.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Howell, ‘Christian Suffering and Martyrdom: An Opportunity’, in *International Journal of Religious Freedom* 2/2 (2009), 13-27, here 16.

the period leading up to Constantine is commonly characterised by historians as ‘the age of the martyrs’.<sup>31</sup> The period from 250 to 450 has been called by Johnson ‘From Martyrs to Inquisitors’.<sup>32</sup> In any case, for most of the Christian era this shift fundamentally modified and defined the understanding of ‘the church’ and its role within the state and society.

On the one hand, many ‘negative developments regarding Church and mission’ had started very early. Bosch even argues that they ‘could in embryo already be detected in the early church described in the New Testament’. On the other hand, it is obvious that:

A new era dawned with Constantine’s victory over Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge near Rome on 28th October, AD 312. Few, if any events in history had such a far-reaching and lasting effect on the Church. The phenomenon known as Europe has its origin here, as has the idea of the ‘Christian West’ or ‘Christendom’. Constantine’s victory has consequences up to this day. In fact, it is only in recent decades that the full significance of those events at the beginning of the fourth century has begun to dawn upon us.<sup>33</sup>

It should be added, however, that the ‘Constantinian story’ – according to Stone, the ‘story of the church’s forgetting its journey and making itself at home in the world’<sup>34</sup> – is not limited solely to the person of Roman emperor Constantine the Great (270 or 288–337), his own intentions, or his lifespan. The relationship of church and world, that is named after him, ‘has its origins in decisions, actions, and forces at work prior to Constantine and takes further and ongoing shape in the century after him up through at least Augustine’.<sup>35</sup>

At this point it may be useful to briefly consider both Europe’s specific role in regard to the Constantinian story and some benefits of this long-lasting relationship. In particular, the issue of Europe’s rapidly diminishing Christian identity is highly relevant in the present situation. The current quest for that continent’s ‘soul’ touches on European interdependence with the Christendom narrative. It can be argued that Christianity had an even greater formative influence on Europe than its ancient heritage.<sup>36</sup> According to Koch and Smith, it was only in the late seventeenth-century that ‘Europe’ replaced ‘Christendom’ or the ‘Christian Commonwealth’ as the

<sup>31</sup> David F. Wright, ‘The Testimony of Blood: The Charisma of Martyrdom’, in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 160 (October–December 2003), 387–97, here 387.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1976), 67–122.

<sup>33</sup> Bosch, *Witness to the World*, 102.

<sup>34</sup> Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 131.

<sup>35</sup> Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 116.

<sup>36</sup> Günther Lottes, ‘Formationsprinzipien der europäischen Geschichte’, in Dieter Holtmann and Peter Riemer (eds), *Europa, Einheit und Vielfalt: eine interdisziplinäre Betrachtung* (Münster, Germany: LIT Verlag, 2001), 129–52, here 134.

prevalent term'.<sup>37</sup> Certainly, the formation of a Christian-oriented cultural area and a Christian identity on the European continent was one of the greatest achievements of Constantinianism. The loss of that identity and the resulting spiritual and moral vacuum has incalculable consequences for future European development. Nussbaum aptly observed the irony that 'just as Christians agree to bury the concept of Christendom, radical Muslims emerge on a mission to expand *'shari'a-dom'*'.<sup>38</sup> An increasingly post-Christian Europe can hardly put forward alternatives, either to the growing influence of Islam, nor to the New Atheism, or what John Paul II termed as the 'culture of death'.<sup>39</sup> In retrospect, a further important benefit of the Constantinian story can be identified. Despite its long-lasting repression of dissenters, Christendom's culture reluctantly, though repeatedly, had to provide the starting-point for several Christian renewal movements which more or less anticipated the end of the Constantinian era.

However, instead of romantic nostalgia for 'the brilliant past... when Europe was a Christian country',<sup>40</sup> there needs to be a critical assessment of the quality and depth of its spiritual life and practices. In the words of Hunsberger, it 'was precisely the problem with Christendom in the end, that finally the society had the shell of the Christian faith's perspective and ethos while no longer holding to its essential faith'.<sup>41</sup> This reflects the typical dilemma of Christendom. On the one hand, it offered nationwide basic networks of pastoral care. And on the other hand, this religious infrastructure mainly produced nominal Christianity.<sup>42</sup> Thus, it appears that by establishing cultural Christianity, Constantinianism demonstrated its major contributions and weaknesses at the same time. The very concept of discipleship became obsolete in a Christianised society, where the 'world'

<sup>37</sup> Richard Koch and Christ Smith, *Suicide of the West* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), 15.

<sup>38</sup> Stan Nussbaum, *A Reader's Guide to Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 153.

<sup>39</sup> Eric Kaufman, *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth? Demography and Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Profile Books, 2010), 181-82. Vladimir Palko, *Die Löwen kommen: Warum Europa und Amerika auf eine neue Tyrannei zusteuern* (Kißlegg, Germany: Fe-Medienverlag, 2015), 479-502. Donald De Marco and Benjamin Wicker, *Architects of the Culture of Death* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2004), 18.

<sup>40</sup> Novalis, *Abendländische Vision* (Heidelberg, Germany: Kemper, 1947), 18.

<sup>41</sup> George R. Hunsberger, *The Story That Chooses Us: A Tapestry of Missional Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 84.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Edward Rommen, *Namenschristentum: Theologisch-soziologische Erwägungen* (Bad Liebenzell, Germany: VLM, 1985), 62-81. See also Anthony R. Cross, *Recovering the Evangelical Sacrament: Baptisma Semper Reformandum* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 86.

ceased to be an antonym of the church.<sup>43</sup> ‘The close connection between church and discipleship remained as long as Christians were a persecuted minority in a predominantly pagan society.’<sup>44</sup> However, as a Catholic thinker states, ‘a new crisis for the Church arose after the conversion of Constantine, when Christianity became the established religion of the empire’.<sup>45</sup> In addition to the ‘interior discipleship’ of all Christians, discipleship became associated with religious orders and the concept of priesthood.<sup>46</sup> The priesthood of all believers was replaced by a vicarious priesthood of sacred ministers. The simple Christians lost their spiritual birthrights and became dependent on the hierarchy of priests. During Constantine’s time, church membership is constituted simply by infant baptism and subsequent catechism lessons. Now the church is a national church, and some years later it will be the mandatory compulsory church, to which everybody *must* belong. As Brunner further observes, now it is not only *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*:

Outside this church there is no possibility of existence – within the Roman Empire. This state of affairs lasted practically to the French Revolution, even in the Churches of the Reformation, which took up the same ground as the national Church of Constantine and the compulsory Church of Theodosius.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, Bosch has stated that ‘The first heretic was executed as early as AD 385’ and highlighted the dramatic change that had taken place: ‘Where prior to Constantine, it involved a risk to be a member of the Church, it now became dangerous not to be a member.’ Even the large Reformation churches continued more or less the tradition of the Theodosian compulsory church and discredited nonconformist churches as ‘sects’.<sup>48</sup> The contrast between Christendom’s forced kind of ‘Christianity’

---

<sup>43</sup> Heribert Mühlen, *Entsakralisierung: Ein epochales Schlagwort in seiner Bedeutung für die Zukunft der christlichen Kirchen* (Paderborn, Germany: Schöningh, 1971), 262.

<sup>44</sup> Avery Dulles, SJ, *Models of the Church: A Critical Assessment of the Church in All its Aspects* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1988), 212-13.

<sup>45</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 213.

<sup>46</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 213. Cf Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture*, 211. Cf Bonhoeffer’s warning about cheap grace: ‘Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate’, whereas ‘costly grace is *costly* because it calls us to follow, and it is *grace* because it calls us to follow *Jesus Christ*’. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: SCM, 1956), 38-39. Cf also Emil Brunner, *Offenbarung und Vernunft: Die Lehre von der christlichen Glaubenserkenntnis* (Wuppertal, Germany: R. Brockhaus, 2007), 183.

<sup>47</sup> Brunner, *Dogmatics III*, 70-71. On ‘extra ecclesiam nulla salus’ and ‘extra Christum nulla salus’, see Walter Klaiber, *Ruf und Antwort: Biblische Grundlagen einer Theologie der Evangelisation* (Stuttgart, Germany: Christliches Verlagshaus/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 142-43. Bosch, *Witness to the World*, 103.

<sup>48</sup> Schwarz, *Die Dritte Reformation*, 194.



and the original form of Christianity could hardly be greater. While the liberating good news transcends this world and its transitory powers, the Gospel had been misused in and for a monopolistic and totalitarian institution for over a thousand years. Now there was no choice: 'It was now clear and certain for everyone to see: the Church is this holy institution to which it is almost impossible not to belong. Anyone who opposed this development either became a schismatic or a heretic.'<sup>49</sup> This was not only relevant for opposing pagans but also for Christians in nonconformist movements. This historical fact suggests that Christians from nonconformist backgrounds can reach out to non-Christians less prejudiced – at least there is some common ground.

Ironically, Augustine, whose texts became instrumental for both the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation,<sup>50</sup> and who is regarded as 'the greatest theologian of ancient times, contributed not a little to the development of the compulsory church' – by his anti-Donatist writings which culminated in the famous-notorious 'compel them to come in!' (*cogite intrare!*).<sup>51</sup> The Greek term for 'compel'<sup>52</sup> (KJV, NIV, RSV) or 'urge' (CEB, NET, NLT), *anagkason*, is used in Luke 14:23 'of course, not in the sense of external compulsion, but as in Matthew 14:22, Mark 6:45, and also in classical Greek, of moral and logical constraint (Zahn, *in loc.*)'. Geldenhuys concludes: 'The single servant should not use physical violence, and those who refused were not compelled to go by outward force.'<sup>53</sup>

Augustine is called the ideologue of the Constantinian shift.<sup>54</sup> Murray argues that 'Constantine laid the foundations of Christendom', while 'its

<sup>49</sup> Brunner, *Dogmatics III*, 71.

<sup>50</sup> Henry Chadwick, *Augustine* (Oxford and New York: OUP, 1986), 2.

<sup>51</sup> Brunner, *Dogmatics III*, 71. Cf Bosch, *Witness to the World*, 117, for Las Casas' different interpretation as 'Persuade them to enter'. For the parable of the weeds, which Augustine also used for his anti-separatist teaching, see Frederick Dale Brunner, *Matthew: A Commentary*, Vol. 2 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1990), 501, and Joachim Jeremias *Die Gleichnisse Jesu* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1956), 160.

<sup>52</sup> Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, *A Linguistic Key to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1980), 185: 'The compelling was by persuasion (Plummer).' Walter Bauer, *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1988), 101, gives a milder meaning for Luke 14:23, namely '(strongly) urge', 'invite (urgently)'.

<sup>53</sup> Norval Geldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 396. See also Theodor Zahn, *Das Evangelium des Lucas* (Wuppertal, Germany: R. Brockhaus, 1988), 549.

<sup>54</sup> Kurt Flasch, *Augustin: Einführung in sein Denken* (Stuttgart, Germany: Reclam, 1980), 171.



main architect was Augustine'.<sup>55</sup> In this role, Augustine embodies some of the contradictions of this system: on one hand, he 'strongly advocated the cult of the martyr-saints'.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, as Frend noted, 'he accepted coercion by the state among the means at the church's disposal to enforce unity'. As a result, his 'forced interpretation of Luke 14.23... was to have grave effects on the history of religious persecution in the Middle Ages and in Reformation times'. Augustine's view of the 'uniqueness and unity of the Catholic Church, with resultant attitudes towards dissenters, played a fundamental part in his theology and its legacy to the West'.<sup>57</sup>

It would be beyond the scope of this paper to detail Christendom's mission to followers of other religions. In summary, it can be said that there was no room for religious liberty for the individual from 380, when Emperor Theodosius established Christianity as the prescribed state religion of the Roman Empire, until the final dissolution of the *sacrum imperium* in the wake of the bourgeois revolutions about 1,500 years later. According to Catholic theologian Hilpert, the close interlinking of religious and secular rule led to the suppression of pagan religions and Jews, the persecution of 'Heretics', and to violent actions against non-Christian peoples (forced baptisms, crusades, colonisation).<sup>58</sup> However, it is also necessary to correct certain biased presentations and the resulting popular prejudices. The new, revisionist Crusades' historiography is a relevant example of such corrections.<sup>59</sup>

### Consequences for Nonconformist Churches and Jews

The Donatists defined the relationship between use of force and the church exactly the opposite way: the true church is the one that suffers persecution, not the one that persecutes! And their leader Donatus (313-355) asked the fundamental question: What has the emperor to do with the church? (*Quid est imperatori cum ecclesia?*).<sup>60</sup> Interestingly, other nonconformist

<sup>55</sup> Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 75. Cf Harry Lee Poe, *Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001), 77: 'Augustine invented Christendom in the early fifth century when he wrote *The City of God*.'

<sup>56</sup> Josef Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom and Rewards in Heaven* (Wheaton, IL: The Romanian Missionary Society, 2007), 368.

<sup>57</sup> W.H.C. Frend, 'Augustinianism', in Alan Richardson and John Bowden (eds), *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 55-58, here 56. For Thomas Aquinas' theological reasons for persecutions of heretics, see Ulrich H.J. Körnter, 'Wahrheit und Toleranz', in *Theologische Beiträge* 43 (2012), 187-89.

<sup>58</sup> Konrad Hilpert, 'Religionsfreiheit', in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 3rd ed, Vol. 8, 1048-51, here 1049.

<sup>59</sup> For a correction of popular ideas about the Crusades, see Rodney Stark, *God's Battalions: The Case for the Crusades* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009).

<sup>60</sup> Flasch, *Augustin*, 159, and *ad Donat.*, post coll. 31, 53 PL 43, 684.

movements like the Waldensians argued with the same compelling logic.<sup>61</sup> But that is not all: even Augustine himself was one of the theologians who declared suffering a mark of the church: 'From Abel until the end of time the pilgrimage of the church proceeds between the persecution of the world and the consolations of God.'<sup>62</sup> But in the same context the 'heretics' and their heresies are seen as persecution from within and 'the church of Christ', i.e. the only legal church in the Roman Empire, is now authorised to inflict a 'just persecution on the wicked'. In Augustine's view –

Donatists are not the persecuted, but rather the persecutors. They tear apart the body of Christ when they assault the unity of the church. There is an unjust persecution which the wicked inflict on the church of Christ and a just persecution which the church of Christ inflicts on the wicked (*ep.* 185.2.11). The deaths that Donatists suffered at the hands of the authorities are just punishments (*c. ep. Parm.* 1.8.13). Catholics actually desired the spiritual salvation of the Donatists. Motivated by love, Catholics hope to correct Donatists and bring them back to truth (*ep.* 185.7). If Catholics must punish the Donatists, this does not constitute martyrdom but only corrective action.<sup>63</sup>

Here the ideology of the outward 'unity of the church' had become an all-devouring *Moloch*.<sup>64</sup> It even justified the persecution of other Christian groups. Such a development can hardly be rationalised with a different mentality and cultural context in Augustine's time – it is a tragic denial of the teaching of Jesus on non-violence (e.g. Luke 9:54-55) that also resisted the attempt at privileged monopolisation (Mark 9:38-41).<sup>65</sup> In his reasoning of the church as a mixed body (*corpus permixtum*), Augustine pointed out that only God will separate sinners and saints in the final judgement.<sup>66</sup> But in the case of rigourist churches, Catholics would not wait but 'punished' them. This appears to be a reversal of the apostle's command: 'Are you not to judge those inside?' (1 Cor. 5:12). As Searle Bates observed: 'The

<sup>61</sup> Amadeo Molnar, *Die Waldenser: Geschichte und europäisches Ausmaß einer Ketzerbewegung* (Berlin: Union, 1973), 374-75.

<sup>62</sup> Augustinus, *Die Gottesbürgerschaft: De Civitate Dei XVIII* (Frankfurt and Hamburg, Germany: Fischer, 1961), 243-45. Cf 'The Bad Urach Statement' in Christof Sauer and Richard Howell (eds), *Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom: Theological Reflections* (Johannesburg: AcadSA and Bonn: VKW 2010), 43.

<sup>63</sup> Carole Straw, 'Martyrdom', in Allan D. Fitzgerald, OSA, et al (eds), *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans), 538-42, here 539. Cf Chadwick, *Augustine*, 75-86.

<sup>64</sup> Cf Roger-Pol Droit, *Das Abendland: Wie wir uns und die Welt sehen* (Darmstadt, Germany: Primus, 2010), 84.

<sup>65</sup> Wilfried Eckey, *Das Markusevangelium: Orientierung am Weg Jesu* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany: Neukirchener, 1998), 253.

<sup>66</sup> See McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 409: 'Contrary to the Augustinian view, proponents of the believers' church reject any definition of the church as a mixed body of believers and unbelievers.' Cf 'Believers' church', in Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki and Cherith Fee Nordling (eds), *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999), 19.

influence of St Augustine, tremendous during the Middle Ages, likewise in Luther's attitudes and in various strands of modern thought, was thrown toward compulsion.<sup>67</sup>

The Jews were also affected by the Constantinian shift.<sup>68</sup> In Kraus's view, the established church no longer wanted to be on the move and wait for the Kingdom of God.<sup>69</sup> Instead she celebrated her cultic Christ, whom she had wrested from the history of the coming kingdom of God. The church transformed history and the eschatological way into a circle whose centre had to be the ritually celebrated and dogmatically stabilised Christ. From this circle the Jews were banished – in the 'Christian Empire' since Constantine and by the Law Code of Justinian. The miracle of redemption was kept within the 'only saving church' and triumphantly pointed out against Jews and Gentiles. According to Kraus, the main questions of the Synagogue to the church are: Is the world really redeemed? In what sense is it redeemed? Where are the signs of redemption to be seen? And even the silent existence of the Jews is calling into question the static and self-assured existence of Christians.<sup>70</sup> This is not the picture of an attractive and inviting movement of good news.<sup>71</sup> It rather gives the impression that the Christendom church had become a usurper – like her patron Constantine.<sup>72</sup> In the words of Murray, 'The logic of the Christendom shift led inexorably to totalitarian control and Inquisition.'<sup>73</sup> The more the monopolistic churches resorted to violence and manipulation, the more they undermined the persuasiveness of their message and eroded Christianity's reputation far into the future.

The end of Christendom is dated differently. Several thinkers maintain that we are in a long transition period before this reality finally collapses.<sup>74</sup> Yet other authors like Hunter suggest that it lasted only 'until the Renaissance and Reformation periods of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries', whereas the 'secularization process began in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, stamped by the Industrial Revolution and the rise of

<sup>67</sup> M. Searle Bates, *Religious Liberty: An Enquiry* (New York: International Missionary Council, 1946), 138-39.

<sup>68</sup> Cf Carter's formulation 'Hating God's People in the Name of God: Christian Anti-Judaism', in *Rethinking Christ and Culture*, 86.

<sup>69</sup> Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Systematische Theologie im Kontext biblischer Geschichte und Eschatologie* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany: Neukirchener, 1983), 104. Cf Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 131.

<sup>70</sup> Kraus, *Systematische Theologie*, 104.

<sup>71</sup> Cf Raymond G. Helwick, SJ, *The Crisis of Confidence in the Catholic Church* (London and New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), xxii-xxiii.

<sup>72</sup> Cf Manfred Clauss, 'Konstantin', in *Religion und Geschichte*, 4th ed., Vol. 4 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 1618-19. See also Niebuhr, *Staaten*, 105.

<sup>73</sup> Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 112.

<sup>74</sup> Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 3.

the modern city which dislocated peoples from their traditions'.<sup>75</sup> In any case, as Richardson noted, the 'disintegration of Christendom began at the close of the Middle Ages with the rise of nationalism, the Reformation and the inevitable secularization of society which followed the Renaissance'.<sup>76</sup> Thus, the current transitional crisis is the culmination of a process that lasted at least 500 years. Kraemer mentions that 'the steadily growing slow process of secularization in the cultural, political and social spheres' has challenged the status quo and 'has meant the gradual shattering of this *Corpus Christianum*'.<sup>77</sup> But this dissolution of century-old ties was not a linear process. Newbigin argues that the 'breakdown of Christendom' took place slowly at first, 'but later more and more rapidly'.<sup>78</sup> At the end of this evolution stands the transition from the mediæval ideal of *Christendom* to *Post-Christendom* in a culture that had seen itself as Christian for many centuries. It is obvious that the driving forces of this process were and are opposed to the enforced uniformity, the pressure to conformity, and the inauthenticity of a forced confession that are associated with the history of Christendom. That indicates that there is no way back. Instead, there is a need to thoroughly analyse the new post-Christendom situation with its dynamic changes, and find adequate responses to it.

### Conclusion

The religious-political construct of Christendom is certainly a complex and multifaceted phenomenon and its assessment depends on the respective eschatological and ecclesiological view: 'How people view Constantine and the subsequent political recognition of Christianity, whether positively or negatively', is, according to Snyder, a key indicator of their models of church and kingdom'.<sup>79</sup> Despite the contemplated violent parts of its history, the Constantinian alliance contributed to an impressive civilisation<sup>80</sup> that contained and preserved many Judeo-Christian values to

<sup>75</sup> George G. Hunter III, *The Contagious Congregation: Frontiers in Evangelism and Church Growth* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1979), 85-86. See also Poe, *Christian Witness*, 21.

<sup>76</sup> Alan Richardson, 'Christendom', in Alan Richardson and John Bowden (eds), *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2002), NDCT, 94. On the Reformation's contribution, see George W. Hunter III, *How to Reach Secular People* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 27.

<sup>77</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (New York / London: Harper & Brothers, 1938), 27.

<sup>78</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998), 1; cf Hunter III, *Contagious Congregation*, 85-86.

<sup>79</sup> Howard A. Snyder, *Models of the Kingdom* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 164.

<sup>80</sup> Yet religious freedom is an achievement of nonconformist churches. Cf Thomas Schirrmacher, 'Christianity and Democracy', in *International Journal of Religious Freedom* 2/2 (2009), 73-85, here 75. Thomas Weißenborn, *Religionsfreiheit:*

the present day, although these values are eroding rapidly. And it is to be regretted that the abuse of power and power games happen also in former nonconformist churches and para-church organisations. However, in the New Testament such behaviour is unambiguously denounced as destructive and sinful (e.g. 3 John 9-11). Yet in the structures of Christendom it seems to be a permanent part of the system for many centuries. The misuse of power and persecution in the history of the church is a contradiction of the liberating gospel of Christ, whose kingdom is both spiritual and non-violent (John 18:36).<sup>81</sup> This obscuration of the good news is certainly one of the biggest obstacles to the faith of many contemporaries. An examination of the era of Christendom clearly contributes to the study of the conditions of religious freedom and persecution. The Constantinian shift obscured the nature and mission of the church, had serious soteriological implications, and its compulsion to religious uniformity resulted inevitably in the loss of religious liberty for all religious dissenters. Certainly the post-Christendom crisis goes beyond mere structural or denominational issues. In a recent contribution, Anglican bishop John Finney concludes that 'Christendom is slipping away – bit by bit it is being stripped from us... We are entering a new world... We have to go back before the age of Christendom... and take the Gospel to people who know nothing about it'.<sup>82</sup> It will be a new challenge for this and the coming generations of Christians to navigate through unknown territory without using the outdated maps of Constantinianism. On reflection, one is forced to conclude that the experiences of former nonconformist movements and today's persecuted Christian communities may rather provide orientation for the future.

Copyrighted Material

---

*Christliche Wahrheit und menschliche Würde in Konflikt?* (Marburg, Germany: Francke, 2003), 9.

<sup>81</sup> Cf Josef Ratzinger Benedikt XVI, *Jesus von Nazareth*, Vol. 2 (Freiburg, Germany: Herder, 2011), 214.

<sup>82</sup> John Finney, 'Leadership in Mission: The Stripping of the Church', in *Theologische Beiträge* 45 (2014), 267-83, here 282.

# MISSION, HUMAN RIGHTS AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM – A RELATIONSHIP OF LIGHT AND SHADOW: HISTORICAL, ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES<sup>1</sup>

Dietrich Werner

‘Human rights are not the ‘context’ of our mission but its very ‘text’ and the heart of the freedom-bringing Gospel. ‘Human rights’ are not just the slogan of the political activist; it sums up the Christian missionary imperative.’<sup>2</sup> Passionate pleas like this from the former general secretary of WCC, Emilio Castro, are not found too often within Protestant missiology publications. At first glance, the impression prevails that Christian mission and the discourse and proper understanding of human rights and religious freedom have been rather distant from one another, if meeting at all. For a superficial first view, the picture seems to confirm that mission and human rights for long periods have been alien to each other: an entry on ‘human rights’ is missing in some of the older German dictionaries on Christian mission,<sup>3</sup> some major monographs on Christian mission history do not provide a major essay on the topic;<sup>4</sup> also a major German monograph on mission and human rights is still missing – in striking contrast to the situation of research and publications in the Anglo-Saxon world.<sup>5</sup> This will confirm the overall broader historical assessment that, by and large, a clearer and systematic formulation of human rights was an achievement of modern times, often fought for in opposition to dominating Christian

---

<sup>1</sup> Updated and shortened version of an earlier essay (in German) on ‘Mission und Menschenrechte’, ‘in *Studienband Menschenrechte und Entwicklung* (Hamburg, Germany: EKD-KED, 1995); also published in Dietrich Werner, *Wiederentdeckung einer Missionarischen Kirche* (Hamburg, Germany: EB Verlag, 2005), 405-28.

<sup>2</sup> Emilio Castro, editorial for theme issue: ‘Human Rights and Mission’, *IRM* 56 (1977), No. 263, 216.

<sup>3</sup> See H. Rzepkowski, *Lexikon der Mission. Geschichte. Theologie, Ethnologie* (Styria Verlag, 1992); Stephen Neill and Niels-Peter Moritzen, *Lexikon zur Weltmission* (Wuppertal-Erlangen, Germany: Brockhaus Verlag 1975), 347. See also, as a positive exception, K. Müller and Th. Sundermeier (eds), *Lexikon missionstheologischer Grundbegriffe* (Berlin: Reimer Verlag, 1987), 270-72.

<sup>4</sup> See Stephen Neill, *Geschichte der christlichen Mission* (Erlangen, Germany: Verlag Ev-Luth. Mission, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> See Max L. Stackhouse, *Human Rights and the Global Mission of the Church* (Cambridge, MA: Boston Theological Institute, 1985).

churches rather than with Christian churches as an *avant garde* of religious freedom. An advanced understanding of religious freedom and human rights resulted from the historical processes of struggling with attempts for renewal after the confessional wars in Europe in the 17th century and also the aftermath of two devastating world wars in the same continent which led to a process of defining essential human rights at international levels only after the Second World War.<sup>6</sup>

A second glance, however, into the history of Christian mission and the interrelated history of global ecumenism, which resulted from the International Missionary Council, also reveals some different results which lead us to be more cautious in terms of superficial generalising statements on the relationship between mission, human rights and religious freedom: the vivid ecumenical debate on human rights before and after the international consultation in St Pölten (Austria) 1974, as well as the WCC Assembly in Nairobi 1975,<sup>7</sup> is widely known and has initiated a lot of resonance and publications both in the Protestant association of mission and churches in Germany (Evangelisches Missionswerk),<sup>8</sup> in resources from regional mission boards<sup>9</sup> as well as in subsequent international conferences.<sup>10</sup> The confrontations of churches in the global South, particularly in Latin America and Africa, with dictatorial regimes in the post-colonial decades, have left clear marks and led to an intensified ecumenical dialogue on the understanding of human rights in the late 1960, 1970s and 1980s.

<sup>6</sup> See Klaus Schäfer, 'Menschenrechte – ein Thema für die Kirchen der Welt', in *Jahrbuch Mission* 2005, 9-12.

<sup>7</sup> See Ulrich Scheuner, 'Die Menschenrechte in der ökumenischen Diskussion', *Ökumenische Rundschau* 1975, 152-56.

<sup>8</sup> See EMW-Publikations for Rogation Sunday of Weltmission 1978: 'Gott gibt uns Rechte, treten wir dafür ein!' *Beiträge zum Thema Weltmission und Menschenrechte* (Hamburg, Germany: EMW, 1978).

<sup>9</sup> See the important declaration of Berliner Missionswerk: *Mission und Menschenrechte* (Ein Wort des BMW zu aktuellen Problemen seiner Arbeit, Berlin 1984); from Basel Mission: Peter Saladin, 'Der weltweite Kampf für die Menschenrechte – eine Aufgabe für Christen', in *Texte und Dokumente No. 1* (Basler Mission, April 1979); from Catholic perspectives: Alfons Brüntrup: *Menschenrechte – ein Thema für Theologie und Kirche?* (Missio-Korrespondenz 3/85); *Mission im Dienst der Menschenrechte* (Immensee, Switzerland: Verlag der Immenseer Missionare, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> In the International Association of Mission Studies (IAMS) several contributions to the debate on mission and human rights were made; see *Christian Mission and Human Transformation* (Report of the Sixth IAMS Conference, Harare, Zimbabwe, 8th-14th January 1985, 70-72) and *Mission Studies* 1 (1984), Vol. 2, 13-17.



Thus a first tentative conclusion can neither be properly summarised with the general statement ‘Christian mission defends human rights’,<sup>11</sup> nor with the blunt and too often recited other extreme: ‘Christian mission has violated basic human rights throughout all its history.’ The relationship is too complex to be summarised with easy generalisations. Certainly there are traditions within Christian mission history, particularly those types of Christian mission which were built on a strategic alliance with colonial, state or majority powers, which have gravely violated our contemporary understanding of human rights. It is not difficult to show how Christian mission in its various historical contexts has been part and subject or even captive to the ‘spirit of the time’. But it is at the same time needed and appropriate to look into those parts of Christian mission history which provide counter-evidence to the general prejudice of Christian mission being an ally of injustice and colonialism. There obviously is an amazing history of missionary engagement for the rights of indigenous people, for freedom of thinking and the value of cultural traditions as well.<sup>12</sup> There are striking voices within early Roman Catholic and Protestant Christian mission which develop a genuine and profound early understanding of human rights and freedom which was articulated many decades before the international discourse on human rights came to its culmination following the Second World War.

In the following paragraphs on *missiological perspectives*, we will first gather some historical evidence to correct the one-sided generalisation claiming a general ‘abstinence of Christian mission’ from any understanding of human rights and Christian freedom. This will contribute historical perspectives on the relationship between the debate on Christian mission, human rights and religious freedom.

Secondly we will highlight some *ecumenical perspectives*, i.e. leading motifs in the early post-Second World War phase of the institutionalised phase of the ecumenical movement as this was a formative phase for much of the conceptual debate on human rights and freedom of religion. There are in this phase certain relationships between the ecumenical concept of *Missio Dei*, the emerging understanding of a secular state and the concept of human rights, including freedom of religion.

Finally we will shed light on the *interreligious perspectives*, i.e. the relationship between the concept of human rights, religious freedom and interreligious dialogue which determines much of the later phases of

<sup>11</sup> See for the Catholic discussion, Jochen Erlenberg, ‘Von Las Casas bis Kardinal Sin’, in *Mission verteidigt die Menschenrechte*, Mission aktuell Heft 5 (1988), 26-32.

<sup>12</sup> See Wolfgang Huber, Art. Menschenrechte’, in *Lexikon missionstheologischer Grundbegriffe*, 271; see also Jan van Butselaar: ‘Religious Freedom and Christian Mission’, in Inus Daneel, Charles Van Engen and Hendrik Vroom (eds), *Fullness of Life for All. Challenges for Mission in the early 21st Century* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), 165-80.



dialogue on human rights and freedom of religion towards the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century.

### **Christian Mission, Human Rights and Religious Freedom – Some Missiological Perspectives**

It is beyond doubt that parts of what can be called the history of imperial Christian mission, i.e. mission from above, with support from the state, coercion and violence, can be read as a gigantic list of transgressions against human dignity and freedom by Christian mission; this may be the Spanish Conquista in Latin America, the war against the Herero in Namibia in which the Rheinisch Mission was involved, or large parts of the French mission in Congo. It is not without historical evidence that after the Pope's famous statements from 1452 and 1493 on Spanish-Portuguese mission, which authorised the kings of both countries, with 'apostolic entitlement and authorisation', to seize and to 'take into possession all heathen people and to subjugate the indigenous people into eternal slavery', the terms 'mission' and 'slavery' for many sounded more synonymous than 'mission' and 'individual rights of freedom'. However, when referring to this dark chapter of Christian mission, the courageous example of Bartholomew de las Casas should not be forgotten.<sup>13</sup> His manifesto from 1546 reminding the bishops to treat the 'natives' with respect, to defend their dignity and to stand up for their liberation from tyranny, can be regarded, although historically not successful in his time, as a key contribution to later attempts to argue in favour of equality and justice for all human beings.<sup>14</sup>

As regards later historical periods, the two major traditions which have usually contributed to an understanding of human rights are the *specific Christian and religious traditions* which culminated in the first American Constitution from 1776 (with the Virginia Declaration of Rights first mentioning the term 'human rights'), and the tradition of *secularist-humanistic tradition based on concepts of the natural law* resulting from the French Charter of Human Rights from 1889.<sup>15</sup> Both have a distinct role in the development of the concept of human rights. For the American context, the leading role of the Free Church traditions should be mentioned. Having defended their right to 'dissent', the dissenters brought concepts of freedom of conscience and freedom of confession into new approaches to social and political thinking. Members of Free Church traditions of

<sup>13</sup> Las Casas had already in the 16th century developed the concept of the equality of all people and the rights of indigenous populations; see Fernando Mires, *Im Namen des Kreuzes* (Der Genozid an den Indianern während der spanischen Eroberung: theologische und politische Diskussion, Fribourg, Switzerland: Exodus, 1989), 166.

<sup>14</sup> See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bartolom%C3%A9\\_de\\_las\\_Casas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bartolom%C3%A9_de_las_Casas)

<sup>15</sup> See Wolfgang Huber and Heinz Eduard Tödt, *Menschenrechte*. (Stuttgart/Berlin: Perspektiven einer menschlichen Welt, 1977).

Calvinist and Anabaptist traditions formulated these new concepts within their 'voluntary associations' in order to safeguard their acclaimed 'divine rights' for self-organisation, freedom to assemble and for public meetings for proclaiming their faith.<sup>16</sup> How the heritage of liberal concepts from the Enlightenment emphasis on equal human dignity of each person interrelated with the concepts from Puritan circles, according to which all human beings are equally sinful before God, has been documented and researched extensively.<sup>17</sup> Quite crucial for the development of the concept of human rights was the interaction of Free Church traditions in England and America with the anti-slave trade movement in the 19th century. Nonconformists, those in opposition to the state church tradition, were leading circles in the campaign against slavery. The Quakers, themselves a religious tradition discriminated against in Europe, formed the first 'Committee for Abolition of the Slave Trade' in 1778;<sup>18</sup> evangelicals in England (William Wilberforce and others) played a leading role in promoting the 'Abolition of Slavery Bill' in the British Empire. Some of the mission societies on the continent, like the Basel Mission, joined the anti-slavery campaign.

Missiologically speaking, we can observe two key theological motifs which emerge again and again within Protestant mission history and which have paved the way for emerging concepts of human rights and religious liberty at a later stage:

- One is the emphasis on the concept of God having created each human being in his own image (the *imago Dei* concept): if all are created in God's image, nobody can be discriminated against because of inferior or non-human status.<sup>19</sup>
- The second motif is an extension of one of the core concepts of the Reformation itself, namely, the emphasis on the need for each individual to have access to Biblical tradition in his/her own language. The *sola scriptura* principle has had an implicit egalitarian dynamic as it recognises and demands that the Bible be translated into all existing languages. In essence, this also includes the recognition of cultural traditions and the right to access to education and other appropriate ways to learn writing and reading. The emphasis on Bible translation and education, which in turn led to the founding and spread of primary and secondary schools in Protestant mission territories, had a profound impact on the emerging sense of self-esteem of indigenous populations and later

<sup>16</sup> See Max L. Stackhouse, *Creeeds, Society and Human Rights. Study in Three Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 72.

<sup>17</sup> See Stackhouse, *Creeeds, Society and Human Rights*, 76.

<sup>18</sup> Klaus Schäfer, *Menschenrechte – ein Thema für die Kirchen der Welt*, 11.

<sup>19</sup> Illustrations of this can be studied in early Protestant Indian mission history on how missionaries dealt with cultural practices such as dowry and *sati*, discrimination against *Dalits*, the role of women in education, etc.

even on the formation of anti-colonial attitudes and nationalist movements of young Christian intellectuals in several Asian and African countries.<sup>20</sup>

Although German mission history in its broad mainstream also was influenced by the spirit of its time, marked as it was by feelings of cultural superiority and the concept of combining Christianisation and colonial civilisation,<sup>21</sup> there are some striking early examples of a campaign *against* colonial subjugation and an emerging concept of indigenous human rights, where both of these key theological arguments are used:

It seems to be little-known or researched that already towards the end of the 19th century there was an almost self-evident talk about and terminology of ‘universal human rights’ (*allgemeine Menschenrechte*) in Protestant German mission circles, i.e. more than half a century before a legally binding formulation of human rights within the United Nations system emerged after the Second World War.

One example is the plea which missions director Karl Heinrich Christian Plath from the Berlin Mission presented in 1886 in his official address ‘Aspirations and suggestions as to how German colonial administrations should treat the natives’, where he vehemently argued that ‘the newly beginning German colonists should by all means respect the commonly agreed principles of fidelity and honesty, of respect for universal human rights, of impartiality as well as of the impartial distribution of similar rights to all natives as well as any strangers which have come to them, the protection of the rights of labourers over against the interests of landlords and colonial administrators, and put this firmly on their agenda, i.e. not only should they proclaim this by word of mouth, but put this into practice without hesitation’.<sup>22</sup>

This embryonic stage of the concept of human rights is marked by a general philanthropic-humanistic motif of the Protestant Christian mission movement, but is also combined with the claim to contribute to a strategy of cultural improvement for indigenous populations which Gustav Warneck earlier had advocated.<sup>23</sup> Thus in early Protestant mission the emphasis on human rights is not yet directly contradicting the colonial mission mind-set in principle, but it is still understood as part and parcel of ‘Protestant cultural improvement’ within the colonial framework. Human rights at this

Copyrighted Material

<sup>20</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 123.

<sup>21</sup> Horst Gründer, *Christlicher Mission und deutscher Imperialismus 1884-1914* (Paderborn, Germany: Schöningh 1982), 347.

<sup>22</sup> G. Plath (Berlin), *Aus der Erfahrung der Missionsarbeit geschöpfte Wünsche und Ratschläge, wie die deutschen Kolonialverwaltungen die Eingeborenen zu behandeln haben* (*Allgemeine Missionszeitschrift AMZ* 13 (1886)), 62-72. Translated from the German.

<sup>23</sup> Gustav Warneck, *Die gegenseitigen Beziehungen zwischen der modernen Mission und der Cultur* (Auch eine Kulturkampfstudie, Gütersloh, C. Bertelsman 1879).

early stage have not yet become a distinct and clear component of Christian mission work, as happened in the period after the Second World War, but there is evidence that the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* and the concept of *imago Dei* have paved the way for an understanding of the equality of all human beings and for philanthropy within early Protestant mission.

The most explicit contribution to the early understanding of human rights can be found at the continental mission-conference in 1901 in Bremen, where Julius Schreiber from the Barmen Mission delivered his keynote address on 'The human rights of the Natives in the Colonies'. Equality, brotherhood and the freedom of all human beings are here regarded as genuine Christian ideals. Bluntly, it is stated in 1901:

The concept of human rights owes its existence to Christianity. It stems from the two key truths propagated by Christianity: first of all, the doctrine of all human beings created by God; and secondly, the doctrine that, in Christ, salvation is made accessible and real for all human beings without any distinction. From this it results quite clearly that we have to view and to treat all human beings, from whatever race or colour, as fellow human beings, i.e. as co-heirs of salvation and brothers in Christ. However, the Holy Gospel has not drawn any immediate consequences from this and it does not follow that all those who turn to Christianity should immediately free all their slaves; rather the Christian Gospel has brought the general principle of human love into this world, in order that this principle becomes operative and transforms all institutions which are in contradiction to the love of God.<sup>24</sup>

What follows is a radical refutation of the violation of human rights as seen within the practices of German colonial governments in various parts of the world. Schreiber is appealing to mission boards to understand their role as advocates for human rights of natives. German mission circles had by this stage already developed a list of key components of human rights and formulated their understanding quite succinctly: mention is made of equal treatment of every human being, the right to education and progress in civilisation, protection against discrimination and exploitation, the same legal position of all natives, a respect for existing cultural traditions and customs, the right to land and property and the use of indigenous languages. The right to choose their own religious identity is, however, not yet mentioned explicitly.<sup>25</sup>

Copyrighted Material

As a consequence of these recommendations from Bremen, the German mission committee was asked to form a 'Continuation Committee for

<sup>24</sup> J. Schreiber, *Die Menschenrechte der Eingeborenen in den Kolonien* (Kontinentale Missions-Konferenz, Bremen 14th-17th May 1901, Buchhandlung der Berliner evangelischen Missionsgesellschaft No. 43, 1901, 13). Translated from the German.

<sup>25</sup> For the full recommendations, see J. Schreiber, *Die Menschenrechte der Eingeborenen in den Kolonien*, 24-26.

Safeguarding the Rights of Native People', and it launched several petitions which were sent to various German colonial governments.<sup>26</sup>

We cannot follow the historical developments in more detail here, except to draw attention to the fact that, again, it was during the Saxonian missions conference in Halle in 1902 that a key lecture of Alexander Merensky (of the Berlin Mission) again pointed to the need to re-confirm 'basic rights of natives', not only in an individual understanding but also their collective rights.<sup>27</sup>

It would be worth doing a follow-up study to see what has happened to the general committee for the rights of the natives as recommended by the German Mission Committee from Halle in 1902.

It is clear, however, that the embryonic form of the (German) Protestant mission discourse on human rights at this stage did not yet entail any thinking on the issue of freedom of religion before the Second World War. The addition of this dimension is due to two other major, although quite different, factors: one is the Asian context with its interfaith challenges to mission which were discussed during the WCC Tambaram conference in 1938; the other is the emerging East and West divide, and the confrontation with totalitarianism in Europe in the shape of both fascism and communism in the second half of the 20th century, which was discussed in the years leading up to the Amsterdam Assembly of WCC in 1948. This will be elaborated in the second major part of this chapter.

### **Mission, Human Rights and Religious Freedom – Ecumenical Perspectives**

The internationalisation of Christian mission itself had an impact on the understanding and the dynamic of the discussion on human rights and religious freedom. The coming together of Christian mission networks in the 19th and early 20th centuries provided the background for the emergence of the international ecumenical movement. Christian mission had for a long time included the concept of the universality of the Gospel and its relevance for all people as a key conviction in its genetic code. It is therefore not striking, but a consequence of the unfolding of the concept of mission, that the international movement became a major arena for highlighting human rights. Major impulses in this direction were articulated during the world mission conferences organised by the International Missionary Council (IMC, founded 1921). One can observe a gradual broadening of the concept of human rights in this process. The three essential challenges of the international missionary movement in the period

---

<sup>26</sup> See the *Report on the 10th Continental Missionskonferenz* in Bremen (AMZ 28, 1901), 342-44.

<sup>27</sup> See the *Report on the 11th Continental Missionskonferenz* in Halle (AMZ 29, 1902), 168-70.

before the Second World War, during which this gradual broadening of the concept of human rights and religious freedom can be observed, are:

- The debate on Christian mission and racism;
- The debate on Christian mission and the consequences of industrialisation in countries of the South and its impact on the understanding of human work; and
- The emergences of new concepts of a secular state which ought to allow for free practice of all religious traditions, particularly in Asia.

At the world mission conference in Jerusalem in 1928 we can see explicit references to an emerging new understanding of human rights, particularly in the section on racism (Section IV), as well as in the sections dealing with industrialisation in Asia and Africa (Section V). The struggle against racism in IMC circles was deeply indebted to the anti-slavery movement of the 18th and 19th century<sup>28</sup> which was brought about and spread in Europe through the 'Clapham Sect' and its spiritual leader, William Wilberforce (later also the broad anti-slavery campaign of Cardinal Lavigerie).<sup>29</sup> Through close connections between the movement of the Abolitionists with the Church Missionary Society (CMS), these early concepts of human rights for all found entry also into the ecumenical network of IMC, particularly due to the leading influence of the peace church traditions of the Mennonites and Quakers.<sup>30</sup> Embedded in this embryonic concept of human rights was the concept of the 'sacredness of personality', which was understood as an integral component of an uncompromising witness to the values of the Kingdom of God in society. It is interesting to note that the Jerusalem 1928 declaration on race conflicts put all its weight behind demanding from all Christian churches an uncompromising commitment to the rights of all peoples:

All Christian forces... dedicated as they are to prepare for the establishment among all mankind the Kingdom of God, are bound to work with all their power to remove race prejudice and adverse conditions due to it, to preserve the rights of peoples, and to establish educational, religious and other facilities designed to enable all alike to enjoy equality of social, political and economic opportunity. The Fatherhood of God and the sacredness of personality are vital truths revealed in Christ, which all Christian communities are bound to press into action in all the relationships of life.<sup>31</sup>

Copyrighted Material

<sup>28</sup> See Karl Hammer, *Weltmission und Kolonialismus* (Munich, Germany: Kösel, 1978, see particularly on the anti-slavery movement, chapter 4: 'Philanthropie und Antisklavereibewegung'), 41-43.

<sup>29</sup> See Horst Gründer, *Christliche Mission und Imperialismus*, 357-62.

<sup>30</sup> See Schreiber, *Die Menschenrechte der Eingeborenen in den Kolonien*, 16-17; also Thomas E. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America* (New Haven, CT: Peter Smith, 1950).

<sup>31</sup> Statement adopted by the Council on Racial Relationships, in *The Christian Mission in the light of the Race conflict*, Vol. IV, Jerusalem meeting of the IMC (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), 237.

Although in the spirit of colonial mentality a distinction is made between situations of racial balance ('two or more races living side-by-side in the same country') and other contexts with a clear dominance of colonial regimes ('subject peoples'), for countries in which several races are living along with each other, a clear concept of similar civil rights is demanded in Jerusalem 1928:

To establish the utmost practicable equality in such matters as the right to enter and follow all occupations and professions, the right of freedom of movement and other rights before civil and criminal law, and the obtaining and exercise of the functions of citizenship, subject always to such general legislation as, without discriminating between men on grounds of colour and race, may be necessary to maintain the social and economic standards of the community as a whole.<sup>32</sup>

Another remarkable attempt to defend and articulate the concept of a common human dignity of all and the fundamental rights of human beings as a key criterion for the economic system was formulated in the Jerusalem report on the 'Impact of Industrialization in Asia and Africa' (Section V):

In particular, he (the Christian) will try the social and economic system by three simple yet fundamental criteria:

1. Christ's teaching as to the sanctity of personality. The sanctity of personality is a fundamental idea of Christian teaching, which is reiterated again and again in the New Testament... In the light of such sayings, any form of economic organization which involves the treatment of men primarily as instruments of production, or which sacrifices the opportunity of full personal development which should be the right of every child, is evidently anti-Christian. Human beings, the New Testament teaches, are not instruments, but ends. In the eyes of God, all are of equal and infinite value.

2. Christ's teaching as to brotherhood. The teaching of the New Testament is that all men are brothers, because all men are children of one Father...

3. Christ's teaching as to corporate responsibility. It follows from the emphasis laid by the New Testament upon brotherhood that a Christian society is under an obligation to use every means in its power to bring within the reach of all its members the material, as well as the ethical, conditions of spiritual growth and vitality... All forces therefore which destroy that fellowship – war, economic oppression, the selfish pursuit of profits, the neglect of the immature, the aged, the sick or the weak – are definitely and necessarily in sharp contrast with the spirit of Christianity... The teaching thus briefly indicated makes it clear that the New Testament does not recognize the antithesis frequently emphasized by later ages between individual and social regeneration.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> *The Christian Mission in the light of the Race conflict*, Vol. IV, Jerusalem meeting of the IMC, 239.

<sup>33</sup> Statement by the International Missionary Council, *The Christian Mission in Relation to Industrial Problems in Asia and Africa* (Vol. V: Jerusalem meeting of the IMC; London: Oxford University Press, 1929), 181-83.



One could argue that in this vision of a Christian order of society, in which – based on traditions of the Social Gospel – economy and industry were also understood to be under the rule of basic Christian values and general ethical criteria, a plea for holding together individual and collective human rights is already foreshadowed.

Taking up and building on the achievements of Jerusalem, the next world mission conference in Tambaram in 1938, which was engaged in a critical dialogue with forces of aggressive nationalism and totalitarianism in Europe, broadened the concept and understanding of human rights, by deliberately adding equality in terms of practice and access to religious freedom to the demands for equality in terms of race and colour. Whereas in the earlier discourses, the theological reference point often referred to was an *anthropocentric* one – based on Galatians 3:28 as an early ecumenical key passage for the understanding of human rights<sup>34</sup> – Tambaram was moving to an *ecclesiocentric* perspective and argument in deepening an understanding of religious freedom: a demand for religious freedom according to this perspective was a demand for ‘The Church’s Rights’. The rights of the church were understood as a fundamental condition for the very existence of a Christian church, and at the same time as a critical limitation of any claim of state authorities to become a superpower or totalitarian in nature:

There are minimum rights of religious freedom upon which the church should insist, else it will be unfaithful to its calling, and its own power and effectiveness crippled. Without endeavouring to make a final or exhaustive statement on the content of these rights, we hold that they should comprise at least the right –

- a) to assemble for unhindered public worship
- b) to formulate its own creed
- c) to have an adequate ministry
- d) to determine its conditions of membership
- e) to give religious instruction to its youth
- f) to preach the Gospel publicly
- g) to receive into its membership those who desire to join it.<sup>35</sup>

Without this clear evidence of an early concept of religious freedom in Tambaram, it may not be understandable that issues of religious freedom immediately gained international prominence on the agenda of the ecumenical movement and the WCC directly after the Second World War. It is widely known that religious freedom was already a prominent issue in the founding assembly of WCC in Amsterdam in 1948. Some three months

<sup>34</sup> See the extended reference to the ‘The sacredness of a human personality’ in Section I in Report of Tambaram, ‘The Church and Changing Social Order’, in *The World Mission of The Church* (Findings and Recommendations of the Meeting of the IMC in Tambaram 1938, London/Madras 1938), 128-32.

<sup>35</sup> ‘The Church and the State’, *Tambaram Madras Series* (Vol. VI, IMC, Oxford/London 1938), 281-83.



before the solemn proclamation of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights on 10th December 1948, the Amsterdam founding assembly of WCC (22nd August to 4th September 1948) in its 4th section (The Church and Disorder of Humankind) formulated a solemn plea for the reformulation of agreed principles of an international legal system and an international agreement on a common understanding of human rights. Religious freedom was declared to belong to essential human rights, not to be misunderstood as rights which state authorities can grant or withdraw from people.<sup>36</sup>

All human rights, including religious freedom, are traced back theologically to the universal calling of each human being to be a child of God and to bear his image.<sup>37</sup> It is in the post-Second World War period that major attention of the institutionalised ecumenical movement was focused on issues of religious freedom. The first director of the WCC's Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), Frederick Nolde, after the founding assembly of WCC, immediately travelled from Amsterdam to Paris to attend the preparatory meetings at UN level which led to the formulation of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.<sup>38</sup> Both the aftermath of the German Nazi terror regime as well as the impact of Russian state socialism formed the background against which this emphasis should be understood. Affirming the principles of religious freedom as well as the relationship between religious freedom and proper international guarantees for the 'protection of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights', have remained key ecumenical demands also on the agenda of the New Delhi assembly (1961), articulated in a distinct ecumenical declaration on human rights.<sup>39</sup>

In the world mission conferences in the following two decades – in Whitby 1947, Willingen 1952 and Mexico City 1963 – the thematic thread of human rights was not too prominent. In these years the processes of decolonisation, the crisis of traditional Christian mission due to the shock of China as well as the correction of liberal, social gospel-oriented Kingdom of God visions, led to a reconsidering of the concept of Christian mission focusing on its relationship with the church rather than with society

Copyrighted Material

<sup>36</sup> See the passionate pleas from Amsterdam for a new international order based on recognition of universal human rights, in *Amsterdamer Ökumenische Gespräche Bd. 4* (Die Unordnung der Welt und Gottes Heilsplan. Bd. 4: Die Kirche und die internationale Unordnung, Geneva/Zürich, Switzerland: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1948), 265-69.

<sup>37</sup> See *Amsterdamer Ökumenische Gespräche Bd. 4*, 266.

<sup>38</sup> See Rüdiger Noll, *Die Menschenrechte und die ökumenische Bewegung – ein Überblick* (Menschenrechte, Hamburg: Jahrbuch Mission 2005), 27.

<sup>39</sup> Bericht des Ausschusses für die Kommission der Kirchen für Internationale Angelegenheiten, in New Delhi 1961, *Dokumentarbericht der dritten Vollversammlung des ÖRK* (Stuttgart, 1962), 298-300.

(‘Mission needs to stay mission’<sup>40</sup>) and demanding for stricter integration of church and mission. The achievement of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>41</sup> in the UN General Assembly in 1948 does not receive explicit reference in the world mission conferences of the 1950s and the 1960s. Active lobbying for human rights and deepening of the concept of religious freedom in this period came more from the social ethics wing of the ecumenical movement than from the missionary tradition. The WCC’s Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) played a key role for deepening and lobbying for the concept of religious freedom as elaborated by the UN Convention on Human Rights 1966.<sup>42</sup> It was the networks around CCIA which decided on an action-oriented programme around the Universal Declaration on Human Rights during the Central Committee in Toronto (1950),<sup>43</sup> and which developed crucial sections in both the assembly reports in Evanston<sup>44</sup> and New Delhi,<sup>45</sup> demanding a proper international legal framework for providing recognition and compliance with human rights standards at national levels.<sup>46</sup>

The human rights agenda was taken up in deliberations and reports at the early regional conferences of churches which are the historic offspring of regional mission conferences in Asia and Africa. Both in the reports of the first two East Asia Conferences of Churches in 1959<sup>47</sup> and in 1964, as well as in the second conference of the All-Africa Church Conference from 1958,<sup>48</sup> one can find important passages which point to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a signal for liberation from colonial

---

<sup>40</sup> See Walter Freytag, ‘Vom Gestaltwandel der Weltmission der Christenheit im Licht der Konferenz des Internationalen Missionsrats in Willingen’, in *Mission zwischen Gestern und morgen* (Stuttgart, 1952), 91-93.

<sup>41</sup> See key reference text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: *Menschenrechte* (Eine Sammlung internationaler Dokumente zum Menschenrechtsschutz (Hrsg): Christian Tomuschat, DGVN-Texte 42, Bonn, 1992).

<sup>42</sup> See Ulrich Scheuner, *Die Menschenrechte in der ökumenischen Diskussion*, 153-56; Jürgen Moltmann, *Christlicher Glaube und Menschenrechte*, in ‘erkämpft das Menschenrecht’. Wie christlich sind die Menschenrechte (Ed). (Eckehart Lorenz im Auftrag der Studienkommission des LWB, Hamburg, 1981), 15-18.

<sup>43</sup> *Minutes and Reports of the Second Meeting of the Central Committee of the WCC* (held at Toronto, July 1950), (WCC: Geneva, 1950), 72-84.

<sup>44</sup> *The Evanston Report*. The Second Assembly of the WCC (London: SCM, 1955), 140-42.

<sup>45</sup> *The New Delhi Report*. The Third Assembly of the WCC (London: SCM, 1962), 276-78.

<sup>46</sup> See important texts in Ans van der Bent, *Vital Ecumenical Concerns*. Sixteen Documentary Surveys (Geneva: WCC, 1986), 243.

<sup>47</sup> *Witnesses together*. Official Report of the Inaugural Assembly of the EACC (Kuala Lumpur: EACC, 1959, and Rangoon, 1959), 62.

<sup>48</sup> *The Church in Changing Africa*. Report of the All-Africa Church Conference held at Ibadan, Nigeria (New York: IMC, 1958), 56-58.

bondage and a demand for its incorporation into new national legal and constitutional systems in the countries of the South.<sup>49</sup>

It is the WCC Assembly in Nairobi in 1975 which may be regarded as the completion and bringing together of the different streams of thought around human rights and religious freedom in the ecumenical movement: the earlier traditions reminding Christian churches and societies about the 'sanctity of each human person' as well as the passionate plea of Tambaram for religious freedom come together in the new concept of the 'basic right to life'. This term served as a new umbrella for individual and social human rights, economic and cultural rights, religious freedom and protection rights of social or religious minorities – as prepared by the ecumenical study consultation in St Pölten in 1974.<sup>50</sup> The concept of the basic right to life is developed based on the insights of Christian mission and of social ethics traditions within the ecumenical movement, read from the perspective of the churches in post-colonial struggles for independence, from the perspectives of Christian minority situations, and of churches suffering from dictatorial regimes during those decades.<sup>51</sup>

The contextualisation of the concept of human rights and religious freedom can be seen as an expression of the growing impulse and role of the churches of the South within the ecumenical movement which did not cease to ask critical questions like 'Whose human rights?'<sup>52</sup> The universality of human rights which was claimed in the name of natural law or global common values, was contextualised within the primary orientation to Jesus' solidarity with the poor and marginalised. If human rights are truly to be regarded as universal, their content and claim must include the living realities of those who are far from having access to, and can properly claim the ordinary individual civil rights of, civilians in western society – like freedom of speech, freedom to assemble and freedom of religion, because long before all this they still neither have a roof for shelter nor simple daily food to eat.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> See Declaration of the EACC Assembly in Bangkok, 1964, in *The Christian Community within the Human Community*. Statements from the Bangkok Assembly of the EACC (Madras, India: EACC, 1964), 37-39.

<sup>50</sup> See Report from Nairobi, Section V: 'Structures of Injustice and the struggle for liberation' (Nairobi, 1975), 76-84, 91-94.

<sup>51</sup> See on the debate on western-liberal, socialist and third world-oriented understandings of human rights: J.M. Lochmann, 'Um eine christliche Perspektive der Menschenrechte', in *Gottes Recht und Menschenrechte. Studien und Empfehlungen des RWB* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany: Neukirchner Verlag, 1976), 714.

<sup>52</sup> See Miguez Bonino, 'Whose human rights? A historico-theological meditation', in *IRM* 56 (1977), No. 263), 220-24.

<sup>53</sup> Cf Bonino, 'Whose human rights?' 223.

### **Mission, Human Rights and Religious Freedom – Interreligious Perspectives**

We cannot provide more details of the multifaceted history of human rights and religious freedom within Christian mission and the ecumenical movement here.<sup>54</sup> But let us summarise:

- Without bypassing the darker sides of mission history which had its facets of grave injustices and violations of human dignity, we maintain that early Christian missionary thinking brought about several key dimensions for the later conceptualisation of basic human rights and religious freedom, such as the sacredness of the human personality, the universal dimension of the missionary mandate, and the emphasis on the rights of each individual to read and to understand the biblical tradition – all of this articulated in critical opposition to some of the worst oppressive dimensions of western colonialism. More recent research performed by Robert Woodberry even provides evidence that much of Protestant mission history had a profound impact on paving the way towards the development of social democracies in several predominantly Protestant countries in Africa and Asia, based on the early Protestant emphasis on education, social equality and human rights.<sup>55</sup>

- The anti-slavery movement of American and British missionary Protestantism brought about a strong awareness of the racial dimensions of human rights, while early missionary reflections on the negative side-effects of rapid industrialisation in the mission territories paved the way for a deeper understanding of the social, economic and cultural rights of indigenous populations.
- The debate on the relationship between human rights and religious freedom was strongly developed in the context of Christian mission and the role of younger churches in Asia, as well as in the context of defending the existence and freedom of churches in the struggle against totalitarianism and fascism after the Second World War. While the concern for religious freedom was a strong focus in the years following the first assembly of WCC, religious freedom was later seen as being integrated with the other dimensions of social, economic and cultural human rights, and understood as part and

Copyrighted Material

<sup>54</sup> See Ulrich Scheuner, *Die Menschenrechte in der ökumenischen Diskussion* (ÖR 24, 1975), 152-64; Ron O'Grady, *Bread and Freedom. Understanding and acting on human rights*. The Risk Book Series, No. 4 (WCC, Geneva: 1979); Albert van den Heuvel, *The Churches and Human Rights*, in *Mid-Stream* (Council on Christian Unity of the Disciples of Christ, Indianapolis, IN: April 1977), 218-24.

<sup>55</sup> Andrea Palpant Dilley, *The World the Missionaries Made*. They did not set out to change history, but one modern scholar's research showed they did just that (*Christianity Today*, January/February 2014, Vol. 58, No. 1), 34-42; see also Robert D. Woodberry, 'The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy', in *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 106, No. 2, May 2012), 244-74.

parcel of a holistic concept of the 'right to life' as articulated at WCC, Nairobi 1975.

It should also be mentioned that the WCC, while having shown a strong commitment for the defence of human rights in the struggle against dictatorial regimes in Latin American countries in the 1970s and 1980s as well as in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa (i.e. in the countries of the global South), was later accused of having been less visibly committed and active for the defence of human rights, and especially religious freedom, during the Cold War in the countries of Eastern Europe.<sup>56</sup> Dissidents within socialist states in Eastern Europe in a number of cases felt that they were not sufficiently supported by the ecumenical movement, which was structurally handicapped by having to confine its commitment to the mechanisms of internal endorsement from its Eastern European member-churches.

In the context of the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna 1993, the Central Committee of WCC called for a review of the ecumenical engagement for human rights, which then led to seven regional human rights consultations between 1994 and 1997 (with the participation of representatives from other religious traditions), and a new general declaration on human rights which was passed at the WCC assembly in Harare 1998.<sup>57</sup> Accompaniment of churches in difficult situations of discrimination, the increased use of team visits, and fact-finding missions in situations of grave violations of human rights, as well as lobbying and advocacy work in international organisations, became a stronger component after this process.

It became clear in the 1990s that more work and fresh challenges were emerging with regard to the understanding of human rights in multi-religious contexts:

- The situation of Christian churches living as religious minorities within Muslim states (Pakistan, Malaysia, and Arab countries) has not yet been adequately dealt with.
- The minority churches within countries dominated by one major Christian denomination in a socialist context (like the situation of Baptist churches within Russia) have their specific challenges.
- The emerging discourse on the relationship between 'western values' and 'Asian values' in the late 1990s gained new momentum in the dialogue with Chinese and other Asian governments claiming that the universal applicability of individual human rights should be questioned or even clearly rejected as there are genuine Asian values

---

<sup>56</sup> Rüdiger Noll: *Die Menschenrechte und die ökumenische Bewegung – ein Überblick* (Jahrbuch Mission 2005: Menschenrechte, Hamburg: Missionshilfe Verlag 2005), 33.

<sup>57</sup> Clement John, *Menschenrechte auf der ökumenischen Tagesordnung* (Jahrbuch Mission 2005: Menschenrechte, Hamburg: Missionshilfe Verlag, 2005), 51-54.

like discipline, work, loyalty to family and social groupings, which should take priority over an extremely westernised concept of individual human rights.<sup>58</sup>

- Emerging political Islam, both in Europe and in Africa, developed its own specific understanding of human rights: 'Universal Declaration of Human rights in Islam' from the Islamic Council in Europe, 1981,<sup>59</sup> as well as the 'Islamic Declaration of Human Rights' from the Organisation of the Islamic Conferences (OIC),<sup>60</sup> placing certain or even all human rights clauses within the understanding of Islamic *shari'a* which takes precedence in an Islamic understanding of human rights.<sup>61</sup>
- In addition, new challenges emerged with the misuse of religion in new movements of religious extremism from Islamist groups which radically questioned any universal validity of human rights as they were regarded as disguised imperial weapons of the West to subjugate Islamic people.

All these new trends challenged the ecumenical movement to deepen the understanding of human rights and religious freedom, particularly in the context of religious pluralism. The Asian insight, which was particularly developed within Indian theological circles, that defending human rights and religious freedom is possible only while at the same time demanding and defending the secular nature of the state, was articulated strongly.<sup>62</sup> Wherever civil rights are understood in the context of a 'religious state' which identifies citizenship with belonging to a certain religious tradition, one cannot speak of a proper and full respect of religious freedom; according to the International Charter on Human Rights, this includes not only freedom of religion as freedom of individual religious consciousness, but also the right to openly express religious beliefs in teaching, religious practice and worship – privately as well as publicly. The concept of a secular state and religious freedom are therefore inseparable; any religious self-glorification or legitimisation of state authorities are therefore to be rejected. This perspective gains new momentum and urgency in contexts where recent elections have given majority votes and legitimisation to parties which reflect a 'one people, one nation, one religion' ideology – as happened in India in 2014 with the landslide victory of a BJP-led

Copyrighted Material

<sup>58</sup> Klaus Hock, *Die Menschenrechte und die Religionen* (Jahrbuch Mission 2005: Menschenrechte, Hamburg: Missionshilfe Verlag 2005), 42.

<sup>59</sup> See English version: [www.alhewar.com/ISLAMDECL.html](http://www.alhewar.com/ISLAMDECL.html)

<sup>60</sup> See English version: [www.oic-oci.org/english/article/human.htm](http://www.oic-oci.org/english/article/human.htm)

<sup>61</sup> Hock, *Die Menschenrechte und die Religionen*, 39-45.

<sup>62</sup> See S. Robertson, *Freedom of Religion: A Human Rights Issue* (Bangalore: BTESSC/SATHRI, 2007); Ninan Koshy, *Religious Freedom in a Changing World* (Geneva: WCC 1992); Konrad Raiser, *Die Auseinandersetzung über die Religionsfreiheit* (K. Raiser: Religion, Macht, Politik. Auf der Suche nach einer zukunftsfähigen Weltordnung), (Frankfurt: Lembeck, 2010), 142-46.

government which led to growing concerns about religious freedom for the minorities of Muslims and Christians.<sup>63</sup>

The most important recent global study document which may be seen as a substantial reflection on how to interpret both mission and religious freedom in contexts of religious plurality, is the Joint Declaration of WCC, WEA and the Pontifical Council for Religious Dialogue of the Roman Catholic Church on *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World – Recommendations for Conduct* which was presented in Geneva in 2011.<sup>64</sup> It is not only of historical importance that for the first time all three major Christian world organisations issued a document on these issues together. It is also significant that the principles of religious freedom are reflected missiologically in the context of a biblically sound understanding of the essence of Christian mission in interfaith contexts: 'The purpose of this document is to encourage churches, church councils and mission agencies to reflect on their current practices and to use the recommendations in this document to prepare, where appropriate, their own guidelines for their witness and mission among those of different religions and among those who do not profess any particular religion.'<sup>65</sup> In several contexts, as in India<sup>66</sup> and Germany,<sup>67</sup> follow-up conferences have taken place to deepen the understanding of the essential principles in the light of the current trends and challenges on a very broad ecumenical basis. The key principles of this code of conduct are included in the foundational first paragraphs which bring together the unrenounced commitment for Christian mission with a basic respect for people of other faith traditions. This is the basis for a clear renunciation of all practices of mission and evangelism which violate essential principles of humility, dialogue and authenticity in Christ's mission:

1. The example and teaching of Jesus Christ and of the early church must be the guides for Christian mission. For two millennia Christians have sought to follow Christ's way by sharing the good news of God's kingdom (cf. Luke 4:16-20).
2. Christian witness in a pluralistic world includes engaging in dialogue with people of different religions and cultures (cf. Acts 17:22-28).

Copyrighted Material

<sup>63</sup> See for instance: <https://newhumanist.org.uk/articles/4623/would-a-hindu-nationalist-election-victory-threaten-indias-religious-minorities>

<sup>64</sup> See: [www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world)

<sup>65</sup> See document under: [www.missionrespekt.de/fix/files/Christian-Witness-Original.pdf](http://www.missionrespekt.de/fix/files/Christian-Witness-Original.pdf)

<sup>66</sup> See conference organised by BTESSC in India in 2012: [www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/christians-in-india-call-for-a-respectful-approach-to-mission](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/christians-in-india-call-for-a-respectful-approach-to-mission)

<sup>67</sup> See the conference in Berlin in August 2014 with 250 participants: [www.missionrespekt.de](http://www.missionrespekt.de)



3. In some contexts, living and proclaiming the Gospel is difficult, hindered or even prohibited, yet Christians are commissioned by Christ to continue faithfully in solidarity with one another in their witness to him (cf. Mt 28:19-20; Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:44-48; John 20:21; Acts 1:8).
4. If Christians engage in inappropriate methods of exercising mission by resorting to deception and coercive means, they betray the Gospel and may cause suffering to others. Such practices call for repentance and remind us of our need for God's continuing grace (cf. Rom. 3:23).
5. Christians affirm that, while it is their responsibility to witness to Christ, conversion is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 16:7-9; Acts 10:44-47). They recognise that the Spirit blows where the Spirit wills in ways over which no human being has control (cf. John 3:8).<sup>68</sup>

Since this code of conduct was published in a period with increased cases of violation of basic rights of religious freedom all around the world, a deepened commitment to issues of religious freedom and international advocacy for religious freedom can be noted in several important national and international church networks and organisations, e.g. amongst the WCC,<sup>69</sup> LWF,<sup>70</sup> EKD<sup>71</sup> churches in Germany and Scandinavian churches,<sup>72</sup>

<sup>68</sup> See: [www.missionrespekt.de/fix/files/Christian-Witness-Original.pdf](http://www.missionrespekt.de/fix/files/Christian-Witness-Original.pdf)

<sup>69</sup> See the statement from WCC in 2011: [www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/international-affairs/human-rights-and-impunity/religious-minorities-and-rights-for-religious-freedom](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/international-affairs/human-rights-and-impunity/religious-minorities-and-rights-for-religious-freedom)

<sup>70</sup> See the statement of LWF Council on Freedom of Religion or Belief from 18th June 2013, in: [www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Council2013-Statement\\_Freedom\\_Religion\\_Belief.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Council2013-Statement_Freedom_Religion_Belief.pdf) – and see also the special hearing of LWF organised at the occasion of the 25th Special Session of the UN Council Rights Council on March 2014 in New York: [www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session25/Pages/ListReports.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session25/Pages/ListReports.aspx)

<sup>71</sup> See the most comprehensive study document by Theodor Rathgeber (ed), *Ökumenischer Bericht zur Religionsfreiheit weltweit 2013*. (Das Recht auf Religions – und Weltanschauungsfreiheit weltweit. Bedrohungen – Einschränkungen – Verletzungen, EKD, 2013. See: [www.ekd.de/download/religionsfreiheit\\_christen\\_weltweit\\_2013\\_07\\_01.pdf](http://www.ekd.de/download/religionsfreiheit_christen_weltweit_2013_07_01.pdf) – and see also the earlier report: *Bedrohung der Religionsfreiheit* (Erfahrungen von Christen in verschiedenen Ländern. Eine Arbeitshilfe der EKD No. 78, 2003: [www.ekd.de/EKD-Texte/44616.html](http://www.ekd.de/EKD-Texte/44616.html))

<sup>72</sup> See, for instance, *The quick guide to religious freedom*, published 2009 by the Swedish Mission Council under the title *Laddanervad religionsfrihet innebär och när den får begränsas*, and republished by Missio in German in a trilingual version (German, English, French); see also attempts in Sweden to incorporate religious freedom criteria into the country's foreign policy: [www.missioncouncil.se/en/verksamheter/religions-och-overtygelsefrihet](http://www.missioncouncil.se/en/verksamheter/religions-och-overtygelsefrihet)



not to mention several deliberate interventions from the Roman Catholic Church and Pope Francis.<sup>73</sup>

Three major challenges however remain on the international ecumenical agenda for issues of mission and religious freedom in the years to come:

1. The militarisation of groups of insurgents and religious extremists in the context of collapsing states and protracted armed conflicts (as in Syria, Iraq, Central African Republic and northern Nigeria) make it ever more difficult to find any common ground for the *implementation and defence of basic principles of religious freedom in troubled areas*, in fragile or collapsed states. Where there is no dialogue and no partner left who can enforce principles of religious freedom and human dignity, both national communities as well as the international community are increasingly vulnerable and powerless to protect and safeguard essential principles of human civilisation and human rights.
2. The ongoing fragmentation of Christianity on both a world and regional scale, and the increasing spread of self-made missionary organisations in almost every part of the world, have left unfinished the task of *broadening the spectrum of those committed to common principles of a respectful mission* in interfaith contexts which does not create incidents for clashes and religious uproar in certain sensitive areas. While a broad spectrum of Protestants, Catholics and mainline evangelicals all stand together on essential principles of respectful mission, troublemakers still emerge in certain areas which, due to their insensitive practices, sometimes create more interreligious tensions to the disadvantage usually of all religious minority groups concerned. Thus continued efforts need to be taken with regard to broadening education on respectful mission, human rights and essential principles of religious freedom;
3. One of the most grave and serious shortcomings needs to be identified on the level of international law enforcement and control mechanism regarding compliance with global standards of religious freedom and human rights by national governments and regional authorities. Despite the existence of a Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief since year 2000,<sup>74</sup> there is no international mechanism at the UN by which the lack of respect to international standards of religious freedom may be legally prosecuted. No binding international mechanism exists to ensure the enforcement of religious freedom – in cases like systematic

<sup>73</sup> See 'The Holy See and Religious Freedom': [www.holyseemission.org/statements/statement.aspx?id=454](http://www.holyseemission.org/statements/statement.aspx?id=454) – the address of Pope Francis to International conference on Religious Freedom and the global clash of values, Rome, June 2014: [http://m.vatican.va/content/francescomobile/en/speeches/2014/june/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140620\\_liberta-religiosa.html](http://m.vatican.va/content/francescomobile/en/speeches/2014/june/documents/papa-francesco_20140620_liberta-religiosa.html)

<sup>74</sup> See: [www.ohchr.org/en/issues/freedomreligion/pages/freedomreligionindex.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/freedomreligion/pages/freedomreligionindex.aspx)

genocide or ethnic cleansing of religious minority groups – by rapid deployment of armed peace forces with the mandate to establish zones of protection and freedom for those who otherwise would be left to extinction or other grave violation of human rights. To deliver arms to groups in regional conflicts – like, for instance, the Kurds in Iraq in order to assist them to counter the military advance of ISIS forces in Northern Iraq territories – is an embarrassing signal of the powerlessness and reluctance of the international community of governments and states which still cannot agree on an international, robust mandate for the protection of religious freedom and human rights of endangered ethnic or religious minorities. While commitment to principles of religious freedom is high on the agenda of the political rhetoric of most of the western governments, there still is no common answer to the question as to what the universal defence of principles of religious freedom should entail in terms of practical political instruments and what it will cost us.

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

# CHRISTIANS IN A MINORITY SITUATION

Knud Jørgensen

## Introduction

I am writing the following in the shadow of the last Christians from the ancient East and West Syrian churches leaving their home towns in Iraq and Syria after having lived and worshipped there for 1,500 years. I am well aware of the many other places where Christians are minorities, and there is little doubt that the persecution of Christian minorities has reached such proportions that this issue deserves to be top of the agenda as we discuss freedom of belief and Christian mission.

I have been asked to focus particularly on the church in the East, both for historical reasons, and also because we here find a continuous illustration of how weakness, suffering and sacrifice often become part of God's *modus operandi*; this does not imply that 'persecution' or 'martyrdom' are God's will for every disciple. Other chapters in this volume will deal with other historical periods and other geographical areas, including the Constantinian *corpus Christianum*, with modern Christian mission, and with the 21st century.

As I trace the history of the Nestorians and the Monophysites, I shall however repeatedly diverge into other geographical regions and other historical periods in order to illustrate how other Christians in minority positions have experienced suffering, persecution and martyrdom.

## Relations with Authorities and States

Christians in Europe are well acquainted with the Christendom model in which church and state lived closely together and were sometimes identified with one another. Christian minorities in other parts of the world and at other historical periods have, however, for centuries been accustomed to living under other and often hostile faiths and hostile regimes, and therefore often suffering official discrimination and facing the recurrent danger of persecution. The question of relations with authorities and regimes has therefore been a key issue for Christians outside Christendom since the time of Constantine. The history of the West and East Syrian churches may illustrate this.<sup>1</sup> Already in the fifth century, these

---

<sup>1</sup> The West Syrian church was the Jacobite Monophysites and the East Syrian church was Nestorian. Today they are called 'Syrian Orthodox Church' and 'The Assyrian Church of the East'. To this should be added the Coptic Church in Egypt

churches had to operate beyond the reach of Roman power. From the seventh century their context was the Muslim regime that supplanted both the Roman and the Persian regimes. The history for these churches is indeed bumpy, but by and large they survived and thrived until around 1200. Both they and the Coptic Church in Egypt remained influential for over seven hundred years after they were expelled by 'orthodoxy' in Chalcedon in 451, and they attracted believers and carried out mission over a huge geographical area. Philip Jenkins rightly observes:

To put that achievement in context, that time span is far longer than the entire history of Protestantism to date. If such endurance does not mark a variant of Christianity as a thoroughly legitimate expression of the faith, what does?<sup>2</sup>

They were regarded as unbelievers and encouraged to convert to Islam, but usually not compelled. Politically, they were defined under the category of *dhimmi*<sup>3</sup> and allowed to practise their religion and maintain their communities (unlike those who were considered idolaters). Evangelising among the Muslim population was strictly forbidden, and Muslims who converted to Christianity could be punished by death.<sup>4</sup> Generally, oppression and persecution were not integral to Islamic rule, at least not as long as Muslims were in a minority situation, but this could change and the results could be devastating. Irregularly the tolerant attitude weakened and monasteries were sacked by the regime or local authorities. Monks and clergy were persecuted in Egypt by the caliph in 722. The number of churches was occasionally and increasingly reduced. Riots destroyed churches in Palestine and Syria in the tenth century.<sup>5</sup> Extortionate taxation caused reactions from Christians and other non-Muslims, but systematic persecution did not occur until the middle of the ninth century.<sup>6</sup> Christians were often well educated (e.g. as doctors, scribes, and scholars) and provided services to government.

---

which also belongs to the non-Chalcedonian churches – the churches that did not join in the 'Definition of Chalcedon' at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The council defined Christ as one person in two natures while the Monophysites claimed that Christ was one person with one united nature, and the Dyophysites or Nestorians argued for two natures (two persons) in a voluntary union. Except for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, these churches were in a minority situation.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity* (Oxford: Lion, 2008), 28.

<sup>3</sup> *Dhimma*, the pact of security which governed the status of non-Muslims within Islamic society. Over time, the regulations became more specific and harsher, e.g. wearing distinctive badges and clothing and paying heavy taxes.

<sup>4</sup> Dale T. Irwin & Scott W. Sunquist, *Volume I. Earliest Christianity to 1453. History of the World Christian Movement* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 274.

<sup>5</sup> Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, 108.

<sup>6</sup> 'Islam rested as lightly as a mist along the contours of what remained a largely Christian landscape', Laurence Edward Browne, *The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia* (Cambridge: CUP, 1933), 90.

The advent of the Seljuk Turks in the 11th century and the crusading movement launched by the Pope in 1095 changed the situation dramatically.<sup>7</sup> The effects of war were crippling for the churches, even before persecution and massacre took hold. Muslim states were fighting for their existence and penalised Christians. The pressure to convert was intensified by the Crusades. But the more acute challenge to Muslim power came with the Mongol assault from 1236 (Armenia) and 1258 (Baghdad). Christians played a prominent role in the Mongol army, and hoped for a new future.<sup>8</sup> But soon the Mongols turned Muslim and Christians were subjected to intense persecution. In Egypt several campaigns were launched (1293-1354) to enforce the submission of Christians (and Jews) and to drive them to accept Islam. In Mesopotamia and Syria conditions became equally difficult once the Mongol rulers had converted to Islam. Jenkins talks about 'a litany of disasters and evermore draconian penal laws'.<sup>9</sup> Churches were destroyed and clergy were tortured. These persecutions almost caused Christianity to disappear in Persia and Iraq. The leaders of the minuscule churches had to flee to the mountains near Mosul. The Coptic Church survived but was reduced to the minority status that it has today.

Religious minorities have in some places and at certain times been able to live peaceably side-by-side with those of other faiths and ideologies. Loving service and integrity of life have made possible a testimony to Christ not resulting in hostility.<sup>10</sup> But history also illustrates situations where Christians have been a threat to national identity (e.g. Turkey, India, Russia, China and North Korea). Part of the picture is also that when churches grow strongly in countries with little tradition of the right to religious freedom, they become a threat to the regime. The explosive growth of house churches in China since 1949 is a striking example.<sup>11</sup> Since the first Nestorian attempts to plant the church among the Chinese (from 625), the relationship of church and state in China has always been one of supremacy of the state over religion. Religious activities may be conducted

<sup>7</sup> One reason among several for the Crusades was, according to Mark Durie, a (misled) counter-reaction to centuries of Muslim conquering of the Holy Land and subjugation of others: Mark Durie, *The Third Choice. Islam, Dhimmitude and Freedom* (USA: Deror Books, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Dokuz, one of the wives of the Hulagu Khan, was a Christian and served as an advisor to the khan (Irwin and Sunquist, *Volume I. Earliest Christianity to 1453. History of the World Christian Movement*, 459).

<sup>9</sup> Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, 129.

<sup>10</sup> Rose Dowsett, 'Deliver Us from Evil. Biblical-theological Reflections', in William Taylor, Antonia van der Meer and Reg Reimer, *Sorrow & Blood. Christian Mission in Contexts of Suffering, Persecution, and Martyrdom* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2012), 63.

<sup>11</sup> Christof Sauer and Thomas Schirmacher, 'A Global Survey. Religious Freedom and the Persecution of Christians', in Taylor, van der Meer and Reimer, *Sorrow & Blood*, 10.

as long as they are under the supervision and control of the state.<sup>12</sup> In today's China this control is exercised through 'patriotic religious organisations'. Religious activities outside this control are 'illegal' and may therefore be prosecuted (persecuted). House churches belong to this category and may be labelled 'cultic groups'. This pattern of state dominance increases when the primary growth of the church comes in the form of unregistered house churches. At the same time, Chinese leaders promote a so-called 'harmonious society building'. Rather than suppression of house churches, could the regime consider alternatives by decreasing its state system of control?

### Witness, Persecution and Growth

In the introduction to the volume on *Sorrow and Blood*, William Taylor says:

We are living in the days of the greatest growth of the church, when multitudes are coming into the Kingdom of Christ. At the same time, these are days of some of the greatest persecution of Christians in all human history. A supernatural paradox.<sup>13</sup>

Evidence from around the world shows that the enormous growth of non-western Christianity has led to tensions in certain societies. As already mentioned, such growth becomes a threat to the position of the majority religion or state ideology. Looking at the book of Acts, one may well wonder whether persecution and the scattering of the followers of Jesus are not part of God's mission scheme to bring the Gospel to new areas, adding to the believers and multiplying churches.

### China

In their overview on *World Christian Trends*, Barrett and Johnson deal with the impact of martyrdom and evangelisation and ask:

Is there a correlation between martyrdom and evangelization? In some countries we find that martyrdom was followed by church growth. A contemporary example is the church in China. In 1949 there were only one million Christians. Forty years of anti-religious Communist rule produced some 1.2 million martyrs. The result: explosive church growth to today's 90 million believers.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See in this volume Kim-Kwong Chan, 'Religious Freedom and Christian Mission: People's Republic of China'.

<sup>13</sup> William D. Taylor, 'Building the Foundation', in Taylor, van der Meer and Reimer, *Sorrow & Blood*, 2.

<sup>14</sup> David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Trends AD 30-AD 2200* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2001), 231.

Freedom of belief is certainly desirable and of great value for Christian minorities, but the experience of Christianity in China does not lead to any direct correlation between the amount of religious freedom and the growth of the Christian community.<sup>15</sup> Kwong Chan also argues that the constraints imposed by the Chinese authorities on religion have enhanced the quality of Christianity in China. The cost of becoming and being a Christian may filter out many who embrace Christian faith in the hope of personal gain, such as upward social mobility, as happens in some mission fields.<sup>16</sup> I recall Bishop Ding (the leader of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and the China Christian Council (CCC) for several decades) telling a colleague of mine in 1978 that it was doubtful whether any substantial number of Christians had survived the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). A year later, under Deng Xiaoping's policy of opening up to the outside world, reports of a vast expansion of Christianity in China began to filter out. Since then this growth has extended from the rural areas to the cities, and from marginal groups to intellectuals (so-called 'culture Christians').<sup>17</sup> In the midst of danger and difficulties, Christians have continued to pray, to witness and to evangelise in the same manner as the early church did. We have learned about miracles of healing and deliverance from danger and spirit-possession.

At the same time we should not jump to overall conclusions. Other countries have experienced suffering and martyrdom without evidence of mission and church growth. As far as I know,<sup>18</sup> the church in North Korea has not experienced renewal and mission; maybe because the majority of the Christian population fled to South Korea where they laid the foundation for the South Korean mission movement.<sup>19</sup>

### *The Middle East and the Maghrib*

If we return to the Muslim conquest of the Middle East and the Maghrib (North Africa), we find that the churches in the entire Maghrib perished so that only isolated Christian communities existed in the eleventh century. Was it because the churches had been weakened by sectarian divisions in previous centuries (disputes about Donatism)? Or because the church had

Copyrighted Material

<sup>15</sup> Kim-Kwong Chan, 'Religious Freedom and Christian Mission: People's Republic of China'.

<sup>16</sup> Kim-Kwong Chan, 'Religious Freedom and Christian Mission: People's Republic of China'.

<sup>17</sup> David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is transforming China and changing the global balance of power* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2003) and Tony Lambert, *China's Christian millions: The costly revival* (Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> See also in this volume C.K. Park's chapter on North Korea.

<sup>19</sup> David Tai Woong Lee, 'Persecution, Martyrdom, and Mission. The Improbable Partners?' in Taylor, van der Meer and Reimer, *Sorrow & Blood*, 55.

not taken root in the world of the Berbers, but remained a city and coast phenomenon?<sup>20</sup>

The Church of the East was already a missionary church in the sixth century when Nestorian missionaries were reaching into the heart of Asia. They spread among the peoples of Central Asia – the Turks, Uygurs, and later the Mongols and the Tatars.<sup>21</sup> The primary witnesses were the merchants and monks moving along the Silk Road all the way to the Chinese imperial capital of Ch'ang-an. Their mission strategies in China may be criticised for having shallow roots, but the zeal was strong even though they were under increasing pressure at home in Persia and Syria. History also tells about Nestorian mission outreach in India (the Malabar Coast and possibly to Burma, Vietnam, the Philippines and Korea).<sup>22</sup> The Jacobites also had a broad Asian presence from Anatolia and Syria to Lower Mesopotamia and Persia. According to Jenkins, the ultimate dream was to convert a king or a ruling class who could then bring the whole state into the church.<sup>23</sup> They almost succeeded with the Mongol khans. The greatest triumph was when the king of the Kerait Turks accepted the faith. The Keraites retained a Christian presence for almost four hundred years and could have built a Christian empire instead of the Seljuk Turks or the Ottomans. Reading the history of the churches in the East, one is amazed how, in the midst of Muslim advances and growing oppression, they showed striking powers of renewal.<sup>24</sup>

### Japan

A rather different illustration is found among the first Christian martyrs of Japan.<sup>25</sup> Christianity came to Japan in 1549 with the arrival of Jesuit missionaries, led by Francis Xavier. The key leader was, however, a young criminal-turned-evangelist, Yajiro, who told Xavier that his people would not immediately become Christians. They would first want to ask questions and weigh the answers. And they would want to observe the Christians' behaviour. If the answers they received and observed were suitable, they would turn to Christ. This became the strategy: to approach the rulers and to demonstrate good deeds to prove the faith. When all-out persecution

Copyrighted Material

<sup>20</sup> Irwin and Sunquist, *Volume I. Earliest Christianity to 1453. History of the World Christian Movement*, 298. See also, in this volume, Bernd Brandl, 'The Decline of Ancient North African Christianity through the Impact of Islam'.

<sup>21</sup> Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, 62f.

<sup>22</sup> Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia. Volume I: Beginnings to 1500* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 459ff.

<sup>23</sup> Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, 68.

<sup>24</sup> Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, 82.

<sup>25</sup> Dale T. Irwin and Scott W. Sunquist, *Volume II: Modern Christianity from 1454-1800. History of the World Christian Movement* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 63, 159.



eventually broke out in 1614 – 65 years later – there were around 300,000 baptised Christians in the country.<sup>26</sup> The town of Nagasaki was referred to as ‘the Rome of the Far East’. The church had grown to be a highly visible social and cultural institution, thanks to the top-down strategy of evangelising. Then, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, the emperor and military commander, Toyotomi-Hideyoshi, issued an edict in 1587 to banish all foreign missionaries. The reason seems to have been that he feared that Christianity would unravel the fabric of Japanese society and function as the vanguard of Portuguese imperialist expansion. Even though the edict was never quite enforced, it set in motion a growing conflict between Christians on the one side and a tight Confucian social order, and a new national form of religious devotion, on the other.

The church continued to grow, and at the same time the situation became more difficult. In February 1597, 26 Christians were martyred in Nagasaki, but the martyrdom only fuelled the spiritual passion of the church further and inspired many more to follow Christ. The end came with a new edict in 1614 (under Emperor Ieyasu Tokugawa) which outlawed Christianity. The missionaries were deported, the churches were closed, and Christians who refused to renounce their faith were tortured and killed. Over the next thirty years, almost the entire Christian population was burned, strangled, starved, tortured, or driven underground. Martyrdom did not in this case result in the phenomenal growth of the church (as in China). Was it because the Gospel was not sufficiently rooted in the vernacular Japanese language and culture? Was it because the perception of the church as a vanguard for external enemies was too strong? What happened to Tertullian’s words, ‘Semen est sanguis Christianorum’ (the blood of Christians is seed)? Is the seed still to bear fruit one day? Chuang Chua tells the story of the martyrs of Japan and adds: ‘The paradox of martyrdom is that it unwittingly gives the seemingly powerless church a voice to bear the message of faith and salvation to the very people that seek to silence it. It is a powerful witness that transcends time and space...’<sup>27</sup>

### **Fleeing, Enduring or Resisting**

How may Christian minorities live out their faith? In an article on ‘Christian Responses to Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom’, Reg Reimer describes three options: (1) flee and escape it, (2) patiently endure it, or (3) stand up and speak against it.<sup>28</sup> Reasons for persecution are often complex and confused with social, economic and ethnic reasons. In the midst of this complexity, it is essential not to overlook foundational

<sup>26</sup> How Chuang Chua, ‘The First Christian Martyrs of Japan. An Asian Case Study’, in Taylor, van der Meer and Reimer, *Sorrow & Blood*, 186.

<sup>27</sup> Chua, 185.

<sup>28</sup> Reg Reimer, ‘Christian Responses to Suffering, Persecution, and Martyrdom’, in Taylor, van der Meer and Reimer, *Sorrow & Blood*, 23ff.

religious reasons. From biblical times onward, severely persecuted believers have found it necessary to flee for safety. And we have seen how disciples, when scattered, continued their witness elsewhere. This pattern has been repeated through the centuries. In the town of Oslo where I live we have a fair number of those who have sought asylum for religious reasons, and among them are many Christians from the Middle East, Eritrea, Somalia and Afghanistan. Flight by Christians from persecution remains a major way they respond, and I am sure numbers are growing. And like the early disciples, they continue their witness in the new environment. When the Maghrib was overrun by the Arab-Berber coalition in the seventh and eighth centuries, a mass exodus of Latin Christians across the Mediterranean began, depleting the number of urban Christians.<sup>29</sup> And when the Mongols fell like thunder on Christian minorities in Asia, Europe and the Middle East, entire communities were either crushed or killed or took refuge on other shores. It is no wonder that the larger Syrian Orthodox churches, Armenian churches and East Assyrian churches today are found in North America and Australia. Migration has always been essential in mission.

But most Christians then and now have no choice but to stay and endure persecution. Living a godly life in Christ implies persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). Some would say that persecution is normal for the followers of Christ, historically, missiologically and scripturally: 'There is a clear scriptural link between persecution and discipleship. Indeed, there can be no discipleship without persecution; to follow Christ is to join him in a cross-carrying journey of reconciling the world to the Father.'<sup>30</sup> The Nestorians and Jacobites chose endurance and fortitude. Until the disasters in the 14th and 15th centuries, they chose to co-exist for centuries with Muslims and Jews. True, we hear about Christians who turned to Islam 'faster than sheep rushing to water'.<sup>31</sup> But let us not forget that substantial minorities survived into the 12th and 13th centuries. Co-existence was still normal at that time. As regards conversion, Jenkins suggests what evolutionary theory calls *punctuated equilibrium*: instead of moving at a gradual, steady pace, conversions would have moved in surges and coincided especially with social upheavals, such as revolutions and changes of dynasty. One such boom occurred in the late eighth century, another in the early eleventh. The rise of a Muslim majority in Egypt came about in the tenth century, and a hundred years later in Syria and Mesopotamia.<sup>32</sup>

It would seem that the monasteries were central to this endurance. They were centres of education and evangelism, and their combination of

<sup>29</sup> Irwin and Siquist, *Volume I. Earliest Christianity to 1453. History of the World Christian Movement*, 298.

<sup>30</sup> Glenn Penner, 'A Biblical Theology of Persecution and Discipleship', in Taylor, van der Meer and Reimer, *Sorrow & Blood*, 72.

<sup>31</sup> Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, 113.

<sup>32</sup> Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, 114.

education, safety and spiritual practice were pillars in the daily lives of both monks, nuns, clergy and laypeople.<sup>33</sup> It may also be added that until the eleventh century we find a number of individual Christians under Islamic rule who owned sizeable private fortunes. Merchants and medical doctors were still needed in the Muslim world. And many of them had probably learned the same lesson as a Cuban Christian who spent five years in Castro's prison: '... we have learned three things through all these years. We learned not to fear, not to hate, and not to harm!'<sup>34</sup> I recall hearing the same tones from the Chinese Christian leader, Wang Ming Dao, after his sixteen years in prison when I had the privilege of visiting him in Shanghai in 1987.

What then about resisting – standing up and speaking against persecution and harassment? Did not Paul appeal for his legal rights as a Roman? God has given governments the mandate for providing peace, justice and order. Minorities particularly should therefore have the right to ask for and expect justice.<sup>35</sup> In addition to Paul's appeal to the emperor, stories from the early church tell about Ignatius who was sent to Rome to be thrown to the wild beasts; about Polycarp who was brought to trial, but refused to swear by Caesar; about the apologists (Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons) who developed arguments to address the charges made against Christians by hostile neighbours and regimes.<sup>36</sup> An example from Persia is Patriarch Timothy's two-day dialogue in Baghdad with the caliph Mahdi. This falls more into the category of a religious dialogue, but also contains Timothy's attempt to defend the faith.

From several places in the Middle East we hear how Muslim writers and authorities had access to a whole catalogue of anti-Christian charges: Christian were spies, they were arsonists, planning bomb terror (in the 13th century), they plundered Muslim property, and they ruined mosques.<sup>37</sup> But we seldom hear that Christian minorities found opportunities to stand up and fight and appeal their case. Some poorer Christians in rural areas in Egypt tried to oppose the taxes, but waves of intimidation wore down this resistance.

Ron Boyd-MacMillan has put together a helpful list of seven advocacy 'intervention tactics': Prayer/intercession, truth-telling/publicity, private

Copyrighted Material

<sup>33</sup> Irwin and Sunquist, *Volume I. Earliest Christianity to 1453. History of the World Christian Movement*, 283.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Estabrooks, 'Preparing both Church and Missionaries: Global North', in Taylor, van der Meer and Reimer, *Sorrow & Blood*, 351.

<sup>35</sup> The topic of advocacy is dealt with in several chapters in this volume, e.g. Tore Lindholm, 'Freedom of Religion or Belief from a Human Rights Perspective'; Thomas Schirmacher & Christian Troll, 'Mission and Ethics of Mission'; Christof Sauer, 'Christian Solidarity in the Face of Discrimination and Persecution'.

<sup>36</sup> Irwin and Sunquist, *Volume I. Earliest Christianity to 1453. History of the World Christian Movement*, 118.

<sup>37</sup> Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, 127.

representation, legal intervention, illegal intervention, political pressure, and positive contribution (through building up a society with less persecution).<sup>38</sup> In today's globalised world, opportunities for Christians to become voices for human rights are *legio*. I have been involved in advocacy at various levels, often encouraged by Christians who lived in fear and who asked me to raise their voice in the outside world since they could not speak up for themselves. This was particularly the case when the Revolution in Ethiopia turned Marxist-Leninist from 1976-77, and harassment and persecution of Christians escalated.<sup>39</sup>

There have always been, and there still are, many situations where violence against Christian minorities incites counter-attacks or at least violent defence. Today we know about such incidents in Indonesia, northern Nigeria, and India. The authorities were unable or unwilling to defend Christians and halt the violence, so Christians felt forced to defend themselves. For us who live in a safe environment, it is difficult to be critical. In some situations (e.g. Indonesia, former South Africa), the churches finally agreed non-violence was the only way forward.

### **Nationalism, Religious Revival and Oppression**

The period around 1300, when the crescendo of violence and discrimination against Christians as subversives and traitors accelerated, was also marked by a trend toward religious and ethnic intolerance.<sup>40</sup> The Mongol invasions had terrified Muslims and posed a direct threat to their social and religious power. To this should be added reaction against the western Crusades. Elsewhere we also find increasing intolerance, e.g. against Jews in Christian states (expelled from England in 1290 and France in 1306). In Europe the great witch-hunt had begun. There was fear of devil worship, heresy and conspiracy, on the basis of which the members of the Knights Templar were arrested and persecuted in 1307. And we may add outbreaks of violence in southern France (the Shepherds' Crusade and the Lepers' Plot). Jenkins views 'climate change' as a common factor behind much of this. Europe and the Middle East entered the Little Ice Age with cooler and wetter summers. Harvests deteriorated and people starved. First came the Great Famine (1315-17), followed in the 1340s by the horror of the Black Death. In many parts of the Middle East the intricate system of irrigation broke down, often destroyed by the Mongols, and foreign Bedouin cultures invaded the once-fertile lands. The result was a frightened

<sup>38</sup> See Reimer, 'Advocating for the Persecuted', in Taylor, van der Meer and Reimer, *Sorrow & Blood*, 434. See also Reimer, 'Christian Responses to Suffering, Persecution, and Martyrdom', in Taylor, van der Meer and Reimer, *Sorrow & Blood*, 28ff.

<sup>39</sup> Tibebe Eshete, 'Marxism and Religion: The Paradox of Church Growth in Ethiopia, 1974-1991' in this volume.

<sup>40</sup> Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, 32f, 135ff.

and impoverished world that looked for scapegoats among deviant minorities who surely must have angered God. Several of the waves of persecution in both Egypt and Persia followed famines and the visitation of the Black Death. Christians in Muslim societies had to find refuge in remote communities far away from the majorities. '... after 1300 it became difficult to practise Christianity outside the protection of a Christian state.'<sup>41</sup> This seems to be an important background for the final onslaught on Christian minorities in the Middle East.

Sauer and Schirrmacher include such phenomena in their list of reasons for persecution:

- Some countries which have been colonised in the past seek to strengthen their own identity through a revitalisation or promotion of inherited religious traditions, as can be seen in the renaissance of Hinduism in India, while in Sri Lanka and Nepal, Buddhism is invoked against Christianity and Islam.
- In many countries there is an increasing link between nationalism and religion, which leads to oppression of undesired religions, as in India, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan. In Turkey, Christianity is seen as an obstacle to nationalism.<sup>42</sup>

Mark R. Elliott explains the wide array of measures taken against non-Orthodox Christians by Tsarist Russia as 'an ideological amalgam of xenophobia, nationalism, and Orthodox triumphalism'.<sup>43</sup> The same amalgam, *mutatis mutandis*, may be evidenced in many situations where Christians and other minorities are harassed and oppressed (China, North Korea, Egypt, etc.). Even in some Christian-majority nations, we may discern the ghost of inequality when nationalism raises its voice (e.g. in right-wing attitudes to ethnic and religious minorities in northern Europe).

### Encounter with Other Faiths

From the very outset, the Eastern churches found themselves in a multi-religious context. Existence and co-existence must have necessitated encounters with several other world religions – first and foremost, Judaism and Islam, but also Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Taoism. In Central Asia, Christians and Buddhists were rival missionaries. Among the Mongol and Turkish people, the two faiths existed alongside older shamanic traditions. There is little doubt that Christianity affected and transformed other faiths, and that it in turn was reshaped and influenced by

<sup>41</sup> Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, 137.

<sup>42</sup> Sauer and Schirrmacher, 'A Global Survey. Religious Freedom and the Persecution of Christians', in Taylor, van der Meer and Reimer, *Sorrow & Blood*, 13.

<sup>43</sup> Mark R. Elliott, 'Tsarist Russia and the Soviet and Post-Soviet Union. Persecution of Christians', in Taylor, van der Meer and Reimer, *Sorrow & Blood*, 194.

them.<sup>44</sup> In China the Christian movement seems to have been regarded by the authorities as a sect similar to Buddhism.<sup>45</sup> Both here and in India, the Nestorians used the symbol in which the cross is joined to the lotus, which is the symbol of Buddhist enlightenment.<sup>46</sup> Some even claim that Buddhist and Nestorian scholars worked together in Chang'an to translate entire volumes of Buddhist wisdom.<sup>47</sup>

The lack of religious conflict between Christians and Muslims before the time of the Crusades is noteworthy. And Christians seem to have been treated better than other minorities since they qualified to be tolerated as 'People of the Book'. Islam was much harsher against the fire-worshipping Zoroastrians. This may also be part of the background for Patriarch Timothy's dialogue with the caliph. Timothy was the most significant spiritual leader of his day, probably more influential than the Pope in Rome. Christians in Persia, Syria, Central Asia, India and even China belonged to his 'parish'. Timothy wrote his own account of the dialogue in 781. It was initiated by the caliph at the end of an audience: how could a man of such knowledge say that God had married a woman from whom he begat a son? In the course of the dialogue Timothy explained, *inter alia*, the Trinity, the two (distinct) natures of Christ, the differences between Muslim and Christian worship, and the Paraclete as the Spirit of God and not Muhammad. Reading this account, one notes how Timothy showed high regard for the caliph's faith, and how both Timothy and the caliph seemed to possess knowledge of one another's holy book and faith. The dialogue ends with the caliph lamenting that the Patriarch has not accepted Muhammad, and with the Patriarch comparing the Gospel with a precious pearl entrusted to the faithful (Muslims and Christians).<sup>48</sup> I mention this dialogue as a vivid illustration of how Muslims and Christians were able to meet and listen to one another in the centuries before the Crusades and the Mongol onslaught.

Returning to another part of Timothy's parish, China, scholars are of the opinion that 'nowhere else in the world in the seventh and eighth centuries could one find Christians engaged in active study and dialogue with Buddhist, Taoist, Zoroastrian, Manichaeian, and even Confucian neighbors'.<sup>49</sup> The Nestorian stone monument in Xian shows that Christians

Copyrighted Material

<sup>44</sup> Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, 14ff.

<sup>45</sup> Irwin and Sunquist, *Volume I. Earliest Christianity to 1453. History of the World Christian Movement*, 318.

<sup>46</sup> The mission foundation Areopagos where I have served used the same 'syncretistic' symbol for many years both in China and Scandinavia. This use was severely frowned upon by Buddhists.

<sup>47</sup> Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, 15f.

<sup>48</sup> Irwin and Sunquist, *Volume I. Earliest Christianity to 1453. History of the World Christian Movement*, 285f.

<sup>49</sup> Irwin and Sunquist, *Volume I. Earliest Christianity to 1453. History of the World Christian Movement*, 321f.

were critical of some doctrines (ideas of emptiness), but it also shows how Christians borrowed from Buddhist and Taoist ideas to communicate the new 'luminous religion' of the Gospel. Maybe the mixing of ideas went too far and served to cloud a more distinct Christian identity? Was that one reason why the small Christian minority disappeared? *Is there evidence to prove that Christian minorities have a better chance of making their mark in history through an unwavering faith in the uniqueness of Christ, whereas theological pluralism advocating different paths to salvation will cause the church lose its martyr-witness?*

### Conclusion

Let me conclude with a personal memory: on my first visit to China in 1985, I travelled together with an old missionary and Christian statesman, Sigurd Aske from Norway. His first, but brief, missionary service was to a small town, Ankang, in the Shaanxi province. After a couple of years the Maoist takeover and the establishment of the People's Republic of China forced him and his family to leave. He later served in Japan and from there he entered the international ecumenical arena and worked with the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva and Ethiopia until he returned to other high mission positions in Norway. But Aske never forgot where he came from – China; he kept the language alive, and China lived on in his thoughts in everything he did as an international missionary and church leader.

The visit in 1985 was also his first to China after Mao and the Cultural Revolution. One evening an old Chinese gentleman came to our hotel in Beijing and asked to talk to Dr Aske. He came from the small provincial town where Aske had served in his youth, and he remembered Aske and the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway. I was allowed to sit in on this emotional encounter. The visitor told about the past and about the times of war, persecution and oppression. Aske listened and listened; eventually he found the courage to ask very cautiously: 'But today, are there any Christians left'? Our visitor looked at him surprised and smiled: 'Yes, my friend, there are thousands, thousands!'

And then all three of us wept and went down on our knees and gave praise to the Lord.

# **RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION AND VIOLENCE IN THE 21ST CENTURY: A GLOBAL SURVEY BASED ON THE WORLD WATCH LIST**

Frans Veerman

## **Introduction**

The World Watch List is a tool for tracking and measuring the extent of persecution of Christians in the world. The tool is developed by the World Watch Research (WWR) unit of Open Doors International, a charity which works to support persecuted Christians around the world. Open Doors has been systematically monitoring persecution of Christians worldwide for more than twenty years. The first World Watch List (WWL) was the WWL 1993, presented in January 1993, for internal use, looking back at persecution of Christians in 1992. During the 1990s and 2000s, the WWL methodology evolved gradually. In 2012, the methodology was comprehensively revised in order to provide greater transparency and scientific quality. This resulted in the WWL 2013, looking back at persecution of Christians in 2012. In 2013, further refinement of the methodology took place.

The WWL is an indicator system, with 96 key questions, the outcomes of which are based on the comparison of expert opinions (Open Doors' in-country key contacts, Open Doors' Field researchers, external experts, academics and Open Doors' persecution analysts). The indicator system is not made for specific focus on 'missionary activity' but looks at hostilities against Christians in their different spheres of life. Still, it is possible to indicate where elements of missionary activity are found.

This chapter will first discuss the basic elements of the WWL methodology. Then it will present and discuss the main results of the WWL over the years, and specifically the WWL 2015 exercise (1st November 2013-31st October 2014). Finally, this chapter will focus on trends emanating from the WWL 2015, among which persecution in relation to different profiles of Christians, i.e. converts, missionary-active Christians, and Christians by identity.

## **Basic Elements of the WWL Methodology**

The general framework for the WWL Indicator System is constructed by the definitions, identification of persecution engines and their drivers, distinction between 'squeeze' (pressure) and 'smash' (violence), concept of



the spheres of life in which a Christian experiences hostilities, and four Variable Answer Elements for the questions of the WWL questionnaire, that deal with proportion of types of Christianity persecuted, proportion of inhabited territory affected, intensity of persecution, and frequency of persecution.<sup>1</sup>

The WWL methodology has defined definitions for ‘Christian’ and ‘persecution (of Christians)’ to clarify which people it monitors and what sort of situations or incidents involving those people it takes into consideration.

The WWL methodology uses the following definitions.

### *Christian*

A Christian is ‘anyone who self-identifies as a Christian and/or someone belonging to a Christian community as defined by the church’s historic creeds’.

This definition is part theological and part sociological. It includes all people who self-identify as Christians, also those that do not belong to any specific denomination such as the Roman Catholics, Orthodox or Protestants. These latter groups define themselves according to the theological creeds of church history. The WWL methodology opts for this broad definition, following other instruments that report on worldwide Christianity.

### *Persecution*

Persecution is ‘any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians’.

Here the WWL methodology has opted for a theological rather than a sociological definition. While the definition has its challenges because of its inclusiveness, it covers best the full range of hostility that is experienced by Christians as a result of their Christian walk, rather than limit the term persecution to more purely deliberate persecution or extreme forms of suffering. This is because it is very difficult in practice to say what is, in fact, extreme. Often losing a job can be far worse in its effects than a beating in prison. Or being shunned by one’s parents can be more psychologically scarring than being part of a skirmish on the street. Also, to say that persecution has to be deliberate underestimates the implicit and indirect power of a culture which over decades has built up a society or situation that freezes Christians out of normal life.

---

<sup>1</sup> The complete WWL methodology gives more information on the elements presented in this chapter. See The Analytical: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/research/2925474>.

A persecution situation presents a complex reality. It is not always clear if and to what extent pressure felt by Christians or even violence against them is directly related to them being Christian. Sometimes, just living in a chaotic world creates substantial amounts of suffering for Christians and others alike. Other times, suffering results from antipathy or hatred, or it could simply be the ‘double vulnerability’ of Christians in a problematic context, and that will be called ‘persecution’. The latter is what the WWL methodology tries to monitor and capture through the concept of persecution engines.

This chapter presents the concept of ‘persecution engine’ as the phase when a specific power dynamic has come into visible collision with the church. Normally a specific ideological or religious phenomenon starts small as a dynamic that tries to create more influence or power for itself; it is like a ‘flywheel’ developing more and more motion into itself, until it has become a (nearly) self-propagating mechanism. In this process it normally not only intensifies but also expands its influence in all spheres of individual and social life. In this same process, sooner or later the dynamics created by this power engine will cause conflicts with Christians or the church, because these can never subject themselves to another power than Christ’s.

The WWL methodology has defined eight different persecution engines:

Persecution engine	Description
Islamic extremism	Tries to bring the country or the world under the ‘House of Islam’ through violent or non-violent actions.
Religious nationalism	Tries to conquer the nation for one’s religion. Mainly Hinduism and Buddhism, but also orthodox Judaism or other religions.
Tribal antagonism	Tries to force the continuing influence of age-old norms and values shaped in tribal context. Often comes in the form of traditional religion or something similar.
Denominational protectionism	Tries to maintain one’s Christian denomination as the only legitimate or dominant expression of Christianity in the country. In most cases this Christian denomination is the majority Christian denomination.
Communist oppression	Tries to maintain communism as a prescriptive ideology and/or controls the church through a system of registration and oversight that has come from communism.
Secular intolerance	Tries to eradicate religion from the public domain, if possible even out of the hearts of people, and imposes an atheistic form of secularism as a new governing ideology.
Dictatorial paranoia	Does everything to maintain power, not specifically focused on realising a vision.
Organised corruption	Tries to create a climate of impunity, anarchy and corruption as a means for self-enrichment.

In many countries, more than one persecution engine is prevalent. However, one specific persecution engine is generally more prevalent than others. Often, this persecution engine creates a vacuum for other engines to flourish as well.

The drivers of persecution are people and/or groups who keep the persecution engine(s) running. The WWL methodology studies who they are, and which are involved in hostilities against Christians in a particular country.

The WWL methodology distinguishes the following drivers of persecution:

Drivers of persecution	
Government	Government officials at any level from local to national
Society	Ethnic group leaders
	Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national
	Religious leaders of other churches at any level from local to national
	Fanatical movements
	Normal citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs
	Extended family
	Political parties at any level from local to national
	Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups
	Organised crime cartels or networks
	Multilateral organisations

Often more than one driver is active in and around a particular persecution engine.

World Watch Research distinguishes two main expressions of persecution: ‘squeeze’ (the pressure Christians experience in all areas of life) and ‘smash’ (plain violence). Nevertheless, while it would seem that smash is the most prevalent and invasive expression of persecution, it is often the squeeze that is most prevalent and invasive. The WWL methodology, therefore, negates the idea that ‘the more violence there is against Christians, the more persecution there must be’.

The degree of persecution can be so intense, and so all-pervasive, it actually results in fewer incidents of persecution, since acts of public witness and defiance are so rare. So while there is no evidence of smashing the church through violence and arrests, the squeeze is what is killing the church. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that many persecutors prefer to squeeze the church, rather than smash it, in the belief that it is a more successful form of persecution.

The WWL methodology also seeks to negate another assumption, which is that ‘the most violent persecutors of the church are its main persecutors’. An example of this is the situation of Christians in northern Nigeria. One of

their most violent persecutors in recent years has been the radical Islamic group Boko Haram that has bombed churches and killed pastors. It's an unsubtle attempt to smash the church. But in fact, for most Christians the greatest threat comes from a creeping cultural Islamisation which has been stealthily progressing since the 1980s, until Christians suddenly realise they are second-class citizens in a once hospitable but now hostile culture.

While smash can be measured and tracked through incidents of violence, squeeze needs to be tracked in other ways – by discerning how the act of Christian life and witness itself is being squeezed in all the different areas of life.

The WWL methodology has defined the 'five spheres concept' to track the expressions of persecution in different areas of life. These five spheres express the squeeze (pressure) in each sphere of life. A sixth building block expresses the smash (plain violence). The sixth block potentially cuts across all five spheres of life.

The following figure shows the relationship between the five spheres and the violence blocks:

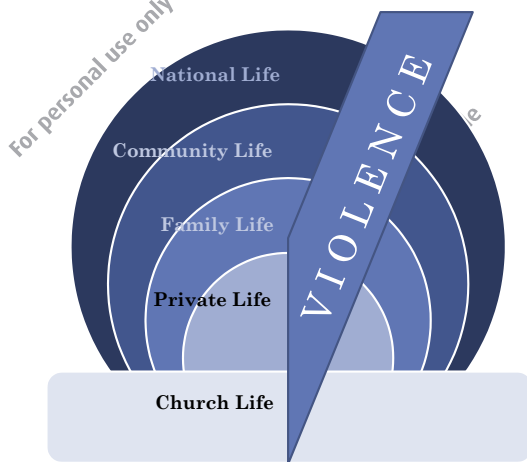


Image by courtesy of Christof Sauer, IIRF

*Private life* is defined as the ~~inner~~ **inner life** of a Christian, the *forum internum*, the freedom of thought and conscience.

*Family life* is defined as pertaining to the nuclear and extended family of a Christian.

*Community life* is defined as the interaction of Christians with their respective local communities beyond the family level and below any supra-local level. This community life includes the workplace, business, health care, education, and local public life and civic order. A mobile person can have several local communities regarding different aspects of community life, e.g. origin or residence in one place and education or work in another.

*National life* is defined as the interaction between Christians and the nation they live in. This includes rights and laws, the justice system, national public administration and public life.

*Church life* is defined as the collective exercise by Christians of freedom of thought and conscience, particularly as regards uniting with fellow Christians in worship, life, service and public expression of their faith without undue interference. It also pertains to properties held or used by Christians for these purposes.

*Plain violence* is defined as the deprivation of physical freedom, or as serious bodily harm to Christians or serious damage to their property.

#### *Four Variables Characterising the Persecution Situation*

The WWL methodology has defined four Variable Answer Elements (VAE) that are important for understanding the spread and degree of persecution in the country: proportion of types of Christianity persecuted, proportion of inhabited territory affected, intensity of persecution, and frequency of persecution. These four elements are brought together in a scoring grid that is the elementary tool for scoring persecution in affected countries.

Countries often have different types of Christianity. These types of Christianity can all be present in a country or only some of them. Meanwhile persecution can focus on all types present or only on part of them. To be able to tackle this issue, the WWL methodology uses the proportion of the types of Christianity persecuted as a variable for scoring the WWL questionnaire.

The questionnaire distinguishes four types of Christianity:

1. Communities of expatriate or migrant Christians
2. Historic Christian communities and/or government-controlled churches
3. Communities of converts to Christianity from 'persecutor background'
4. Non-traditional Protestant Christian communities (such as Evangelicals, Pentecostals) and/or other Christian communities not included in the above three groups

*The proportion of types of Christianity* has been chosen as a variable for scoring the WWL questionnaire instead of the proportion of all Christians. This is because a vulnerable and very small Christian community can easily be subjected to very intense persecution. Or the other way around: a Christian community such as an underground group of converts to Christianity from a Muslim background (Muslim Background Believers, MBB) could also be very small due to the fact that they suffer very intense persecution.

The variable allows describing the situation (for instance) in countries with an MBB population that is heavily restricted and a broader Christian population that enjoys relative freedom.

World Watch Research has considered the four groups as the main types of Christian groups. Distinguishing more groups, however, would not be a problem because the use of proportion of types of Christianity will always fit in with the way the WWL questionnaires are scored.

The decision taken in the WWL methodology is to score only nation-states, as it would be arbitrary to include only some parts of countries or federal states. To account for regional differences, the WWL approach to scoring the questionnaire allows indicating which *proportion of the inhabited territory* of the country is *affected* by persecution.

'Proportion' points to geographical and demographic dimensions of this measure. The proportion of inhabited territory was chosen instead of the proportion of the population because it is easier to observe empirically, and seems more appropriate. Indeed, although the inhabited territory and the distribution of the population often overlap, it is more intuitive to identify which parts of a country are affected by a particular dynamic, than to accurately determine which proportion of the population is affected by it.

The *intensity of persecution* is another variable characteristic to the persecution situation in a country. For every aspect investigated in the WWL questionnaire the intensity can vary between 'low' and 'very high'. For example, there is a case in which the burial of Christians is hindered. The intensity of this hindrance could be low, meaning that it takes some negotiation to get access to the village cemetery. It could also be very high meaning that Christians are obliged to transport their deceased even outside the region, and bury them there.

The *frequency of persecution* is the last variable that characterises persecution in a country. For every aspect investigated in the WWL questionnaire, the frequency can vary between 'sporadic' and 'permanent'. For example, in the case of the hindrance of the burial of Christians, it might occur in only a few villages, while in most other villages of the region, there might be no problem at all. On the other hand, this phenomenon might be occurring in many villages.

To cover heterogeneity of the persecution situation within countries, the WWL methodology uses a scoring grid with the four VAEs, and one category of 'No' and four categories of 'Yes'.

The grid is applied for the 84 questions dealing with the five spheres of life, out of the 96 questions of the WWL questionnaire. The remaining twelve questions deal with violent incidents, and are handled differently.

Variable Answer Elements (VAE)	No	Yes, somewhat or rarely	Yes, significantly	Yes, very significantly	Yes, absolutely
	0 points	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points
(1) Proportion of types of Christianity persecuted	None	up to 1/4	>1/4 – 2/4	>2/4 – 3/4	>3/4 – 1
(2) Proportion of inhabited territory affected	None	up to 1/4	>1/4 – 2/4	>2/4 – 3/4	>3/4 – 1
(3) Intensity	None	Low	Medium	High	Very high
(4) Frequency	None	Sporadic	Quite frequent	Frequent	Permanent

### Main Results of WWL over Past Years and Specifically WWL 2015

Open Doors has systematically monitored persecution of Christians worldwide since 1992. Since then the WWL was presented annually, beginning with the WWL 1993, the latest being the WWL 2015, looking at the persecution of Christians from 1st November 2013 to 31st October 2014.

#### *WWL Data in the 21st Century*

WWL has monitored persecution since 1992. For this chapter, the focus is on the 21st century but results from the last decennium of the 20th century are also taken into consideration for comparison.

#### *Countries on the WWL 2001 till WWL 2015*

The process of monitoring persecution in the 21st century gives a list of 59 countries that appeared on the WWL 2001 till WWL 2015 (covering the years 2000 till 2014). The numbering is based on the fifteen-year average which is the fraction of 100 total annual points corrected by the increase of persecution in reference to the WWL 2006, representing the year with the lowest total number of points for the fifty countries on the WWL.

The following overview presents the countries that have been on the WWL 2001 till WWL 2015:

1	North Korea	16	Egypt	31	Oman	46	Belarus
2	Saudi Arabia	17	Comoros	32	Djibouti	47	Kenya
3	Iran	18	Sudan	33	Tajikistan	48	Mexico
4	Somalia	19	Eritrea	34	Syria	49	Palestinian Territories
5	Maldives	20	Myanmar	35	United Arab Emirates	50	Malaysia
6	Afghanistan	21	Nigeria	36	Kuwait	51	Nepal
7	Laos	22	Libya	37	Indonesia	52	Russia
8	Yemen	23	Qatar	38	Cuba	53	Kazakhstan
9	Vietnam	24	Brunei	39	Turkey	54	Mali
10	Turkmenistan	25	Mauritania	40	Sri Lanka	55	Tanzania
11	Pakistan	26	Azerbaijan	41	Colombia	56	Kyrgyzstan
12	Bhutan	27	India	42	Jordan	57	Central African Republic
13	Uzbekistan	28	Algeria	43	Ethiopia	58	Niger
14	China	29	Tunisia	44	Bahrain	59	Uganda
15	Iraq	30	Morocco	45	Bangladesh		

Comparing this list with the list of 57 countries that appeared on the WWL 1993 till WWL 2000 shows the following:

- In the reporting period of WWL 1993 till WWL 2015, 67 different countries have been on one or more of the WWLs.
- Countries on the WWL in the last decennium of the 20th century but not in the first 15 years of the 21st century are: Angola, Cambodia, Chad, Greece, Israel, Lebanon, Mozambique and Peru.
- New countries on the WWL in the 21st century are: Belarus, Central African Republic, Eritrea, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Mali, Palestinian Territories, Russia and Uganda.
- The following countries disappeared from the WWL 2015 in comparison with the other WWLs in the 21st century: Bahrain, Belarus, Cuba, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, Nepal, Niger, Russia and Uganda. However, most of them scored 41 points or more (not so for Cuba and Belarus), putting them in the same category of persecution as the countries ranked 34 to 50 on the WWL 2015.

Copyrighted Material

### *Number of countries with serious persecution*

WWR has registered the number of countries with a certain degree of persecution, indicated by the persecution fraction  $\geq 2,3$ .<sup>2</sup> The choice of the value for the fraction is rather arbitrary. It is based on 50% of the highest value attained for WWL 2008, WWL 2009 and WWL 2010 (fraction 4,6

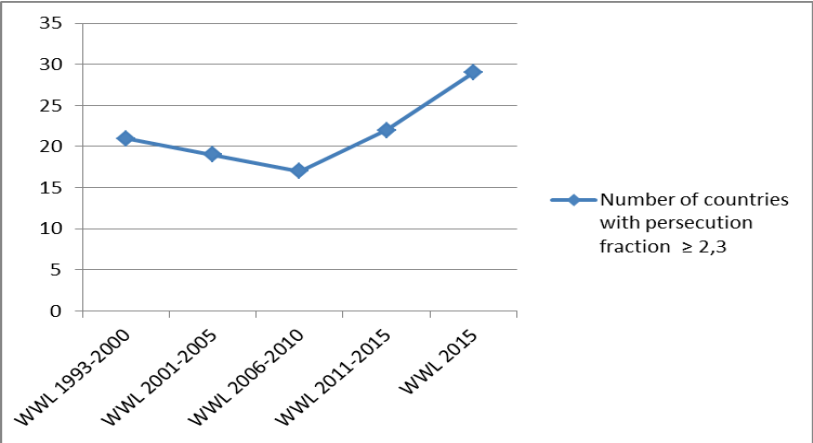
<sup>2</sup> Fraction  $\geq 2,3$  is the calculated fraction of 100 total annual points corrected by the increase of persecution in reference to the WWL 2006, representing the year with the lowest total number of points for the fifty countries on the WWL.



for North Korea), which implies that the focus is on countries where the situation for Christians was the most difficult.

The following diagrams compare the averages of the WWL 2001 till WWL 2005, WWL 2006 till WWL 2010, and WWL 2011 till WWL 2015 – with the average of the WWL 1993 till WWL 2000 on the one hand and the WWL 2015 on the other.

The following diagram presents the number of countries in the world with a persecution fraction  $\geq 2,3$ :



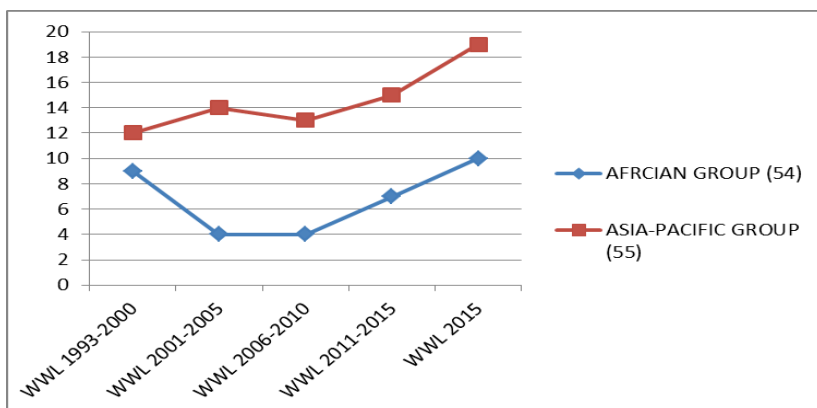
The diagram shows that, after a decline in persecution in the first decennium of the 21st century, persecution increased seriously for the WWL 2011 till WWL 2015. The last year of this period shows an acceleration of this trend.

*United Nations Regional Groups of Member-States<sup>3</sup>*

The following diagrams give an impression of persecution in the different regional groups of member-states of the United Nations. WWR split the UN regions in sub-regions according to the work organisation of Open Doors International.

The data for the African Group (with 54 member-states) and the Asia-Pacific Group (with 55 member-states) are as follows:

<sup>3</sup> [www.un.org/depts/DGACM/RegionalGroups.shtml](http://www.un.org/depts/DGACM/RegionalGroups.shtml)

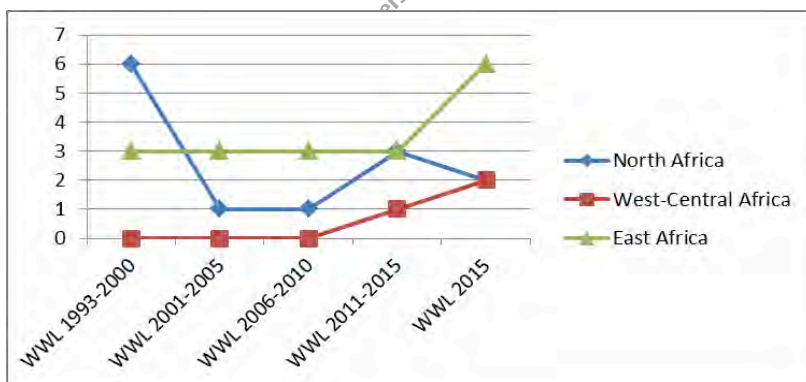


Other regional groups of member-states of the United Nations:

- Eastern European Group: one country with a persecution fraction  $\geq 2,3$  in the WWL 2001 till WWL 2005.
- Latin American and Caribbean Group: no countries with a persecution fraction  $\geq 2,3$  for the WWLs.
- Western European and Others Group: no countries with a persecution fraction  $\geq 2,3$  for the WWLs.

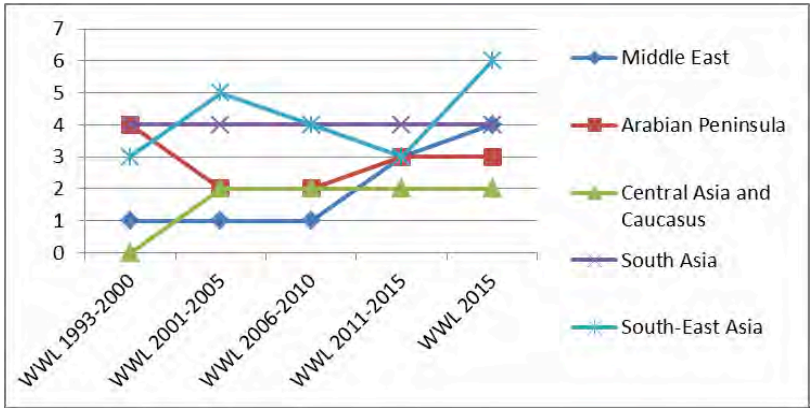
It follows that persecution of Christians over the reporting period of the 23 annual WWLs has been most intense in the Asia-Pacific Group, followed by the African Group. All but one country with a persecution fraction  $\geq 2,3$  are in those two groups.

The following diagram presents the breakdown of the number of countries in the African Group with a persecution fraction  $\geq 2,3$ :



Persecution in the African Group increased strongly in East Africa. West-Central Africa took off with WWL 2011 till WWL 2015, and further increased with WWL 2015. North Africa has been fluctuating strongly but is now comparable with West-Central Africa.

The following diagram presents the breakdown of the number of countries in the Asia-Pacific Group with a persecution fraction  $\geq 2,3$ :



Persecution in the Asia-Pacific Group increased strongly in the Middle East, followed by South-East Asia. On the Arabian Peninsula there was a slight increase in the 21st century, though not in comparison with the last decennium in the 20th century, while the situation in Central-Asia and the Caucasus remained the same in the 21st century.

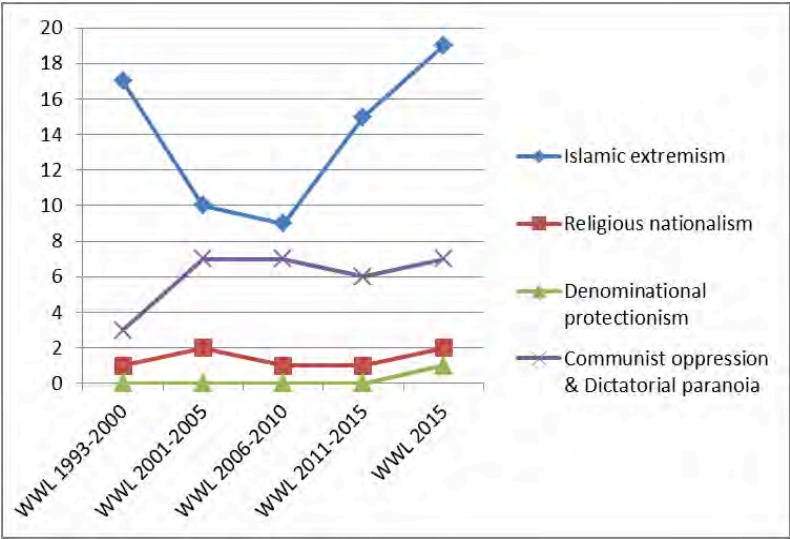
2.1.3 NUMBER OF MAIN PERSECUTION ENGINES

In addition to the number of countries, WWR has registered the number of main persecution engines active in countries with a persecution fraction  $\geq 2,3$ . In most countries more than one persecution engine is active. There may be different main or secondary persecution engines. Still, the main persecution engine chosen for a country to construct the diagrams below is the most prominent in that country.

The following diagram presents the main persecution engines active in countries in the world with a persecution fraction  $\geq 2,3$ .

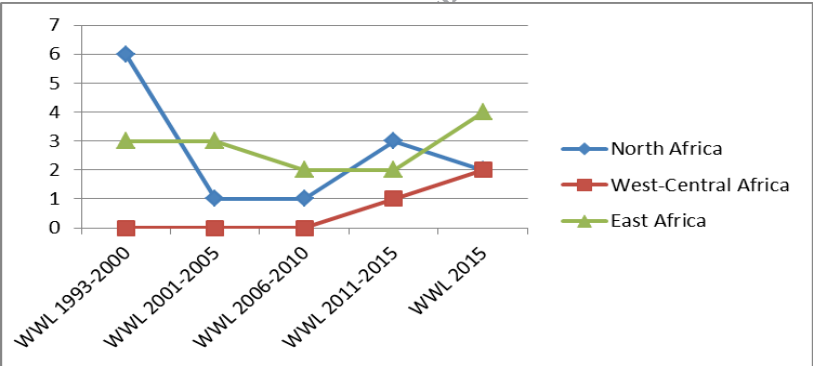
Islamic extremism is the most prominent persecution engine among the countries with a persecution fraction  $\geq 2,3$ . The combination of Communist oppression & Dictatorial paranoia follows at a distance.<sup>4</sup> Halfway in the first decade of the 21st century the numbers were more or less comparable due to a decrease in persecution through Islamic extremism, but quickly fell apart again. Religious nationalism and Denominational protectionism are hardly present among these countries.

<sup>4</sup> Communist oppression and Dictatorial paranoia are taken together because their overlap was greater than their difference in the reporting period of the WWLs.



The following diagrams give an impression of the main persecution engines in the different regional groups of member-states of the United Nations. WWR split the UN regions in sub-regions according to the work organisation of Open Doors International.

The number of countries with a persecution fraction  $\geq 2,3$  in the different sub-regions of the **African Group** that have Islamic extremism as the main persecution engine:

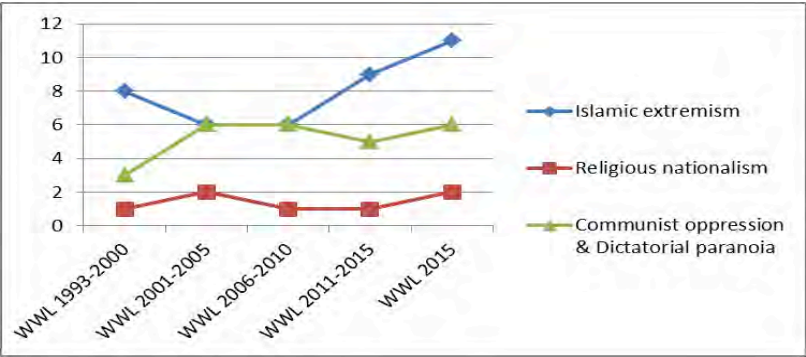


Islamic extremism is by far the most prominent main persecution engine in the African Group. Within this group, East Africa comes first, followed by North and West-Central Africa. Given the number of Muslim majority countries in West-Central Africa, and the power dynamics in that region, it is to be expected that in the medium term the number for this sub-region will increase.

In East Africa one country with a persecution factor  $\geq 2,3$  manifests Denominational protectionism as the main persecution engine on the WWL 2015.

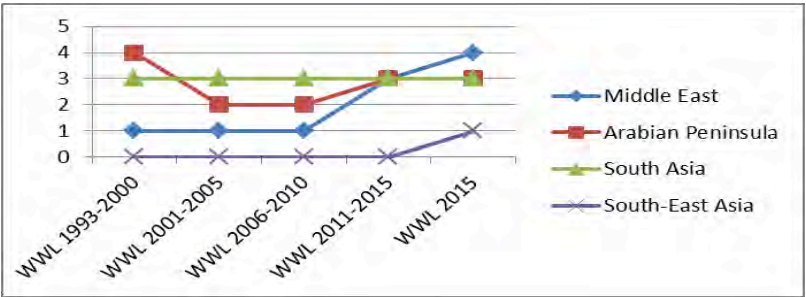
In East Africa one country with a persecution factor  $\geq 2,3$  manifests Communist oppression & Dictatorial paranoia as the main (combination) of persecution engine(s) on the WWL 2006 till WWL 2010, WWL 2011 till WWL 2015, and WWL 2015.

The following diagram presents the main persecution engines active in the **Asia-Pacific Group** for countries with a persecution fraction  $\geq 2,3$ :



Islamic extremism is the most prominent main persecution engine in the Asia-Pacific Group, followed by the combined persecution engine of Communist oppression & Dictatorial paranoia. Religious nationalism comes third and is present only to a limited extent.

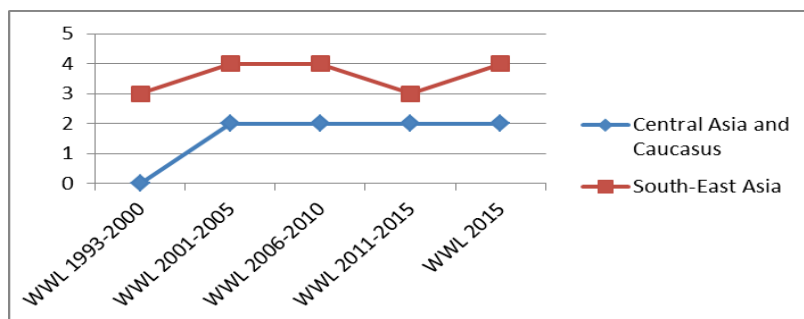
The following diagram now unfolds the overall picture, and presents the number of countries with a persecution fraction  $\geq 2,3$  in the different sub-regions of the Asia-Pacific Group that have Islamic extremism as the main persecution engine:



Not surprisingly, Islamic extremism is the most prominent main persecution engine in the Middle East and on the Arabian Peninsula. In

South Asia, Islamic extremism is also the most prominent main persecution engine. This is not so in South-East Asia.

The following diagram presents the number of countries with a persecution fraction  $\geq 2,3$  in the different sub-regions of the Asia-Pacific Group that have the combination Communist oppression & Dictatorial paranoia as the main persecution engine:



The most prominent main persecution engine in South-East Asia is Communist oppression & Dictatorial paranoia. The same applies for Central Asia and the Caucasus.

South Asia has one country with a persecution factor  $\geq 2,3$ , manifesting Religious nationalism as the main persecution engine on the WWL 1993 till WWL 2000, WWL 2001 till WWL 2005, WWL 2006 till WWL 2010, WWL 2011 till WWL 2015, and WWL 2015. Another country with a persecution factor  $\geq 2,3$  in South-East Asia is manifesting Religious nationalism as the main persecution engine on the WWL 2001 till WWL 2005, and WWL 2015.

### *Detailed Data of WWL 2015*

The WWL 2015 is a list of fifty countries where persecution of Christians was worst in the period 1st November 2013 till 31st October 2014.

The table shows the top twenty of the WWL 2015.<sup>5</sup> The table presents the scores of the different spheres of life (private, family, community, national and church) and of the violent incidents that happened in each country in the reporting period. The six categories of scores for a given country give the total score for that country.

<sup>5</sup> For the complete list of fifty countries, see the WWL resources on The Analytical: <https://www.opendoors.org.au/persecutedchristians/countryprofiles>

RANK		1. Private	2. Family	3. Community	4. National	5. Church	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORES <sup>1</sup>
1	North Korea	16,667	15,476	16,472	16,667	16,667	10,000	92
2	Somalia	16,667	16,228	16,667	16,256	16,667	7,037	90
3	Iraq	13,921	13,988	14,063	13,651	14,713	16,112	86
4	Syria	13,068	13,616	12,956	13,103	13,889	16,112	83
5	Afghanistan	15,909	15,923	14,974	13,706	15,799	5,185	81
6	Sudan	14,205	12,798	13,412	11,513	13,281	15,186	80
7	Iran	13,163	13,318	13,412	14,200	15,495	10,000	80
8	Pakistan	13,731	13,021	13,998	13,487	9,332	15,186	79
9	Eritrea	16,667	13,311	12,643	15,461	16,667	3,889	79
10	Nigeria	11,742	11,905	13,347	11,623	12,630	16,667	78
11	Maldives	16,099	14,881	13,151	16,228	15,885	1,482	78
12	Saudi Arabia	14,678	13,616	13,998	14,090	16,233	4,074	77
13	Libya	14,489	13,467	12,435	12,500	13,889	8,889	76
14	Yemen	14,205	13,914	13,867	14,035	14,453	2,407	73
15	Uzbekistan	15,152	10,938	11,458	12,062	15,364	4,074	69
16	Vietnam	13,324	6,257	11,836	14,205	14,149	7,963	68
17	CAR	11,269	7,515	12,044	11,623	9,245	15,556	67
18	Qatar	13,258	12,723	11,719	12,336	13,542	0,185	64
19	Kenya	11,487	10,119	10,964	7,802	10,100	12,963	63
20	Turkmenistan	15,057	9,673	11,328	12,226	14,713	0,185	63

<sup>1</sup> The scores for the six blocks are the integrated scores for the different persecution engines in cases this study followed from the persecution dynamics in the country.

The detailed country scores of the six blocks of the WWL questionnaire converge into a specific pattern, the 'country persecution pattern'. This persecution pattern consists of the following elements:

- The average score over blocks 1 to 5.
- The deviance from the average score of the scores of the family, community, national and church spheres of life, and its specific pattern.<sup>6</sup>
- The level of violence experienced by Christians in the country.

These elements are often characteristic for the persecution situation in a country.

The WWL 2015 data indicate that many countries have more than one persecution engine. The following diagram shows that the total number of

<sup>6</sup> Private life is not included here, because it is less sensitive for the specificity of persecution engines and their phase of development.

persecution engines in the countries on the WWL 2015 is 137. This gives an average of 2.7 persecution engines per country for the WWL 2015.

Pers- ecution engines	Islam- ic extrem- ism	Reli- gious nation- alism	Tribal antag- onism	Denom- inational protect- ionism	Commun- ist oppress- ion	Secu- lar intol- erance	Dictat- orial paran- oia	Organ- ised corrup- tion
Main	40	5	6	2	2	0	10	2
Secondary	3	4	14	6	2	3	16	22
TOTAL	43	9	20	8	4	3	26	24

Islamic extremism is by far the most widespread persecution engine in the WWL 2015. No less than 18 of the top 20 countries have 'Islamic extremism' as a main persecution engine. And this is also the case for forty of the top 50 countries. This reflects the trend that Christianity's most global persecutor is Islamic extremism, and not only of a violent kind. It is not concentrated in the Middle East (including Arabian Peninsula), since only six of the top twenty are from that region. However, it is also an engine that links with other engines, most commonly 'Tribal antagonism', 'Dictatorial paranoia' and 'Organised corruption'.

The second most widespread persecution engine is Dictatorial paranoia, where leaders seek to control religious expression. It is the main persecution engine in ten countries, and shows up as a secondary persecution engine in sixteen more.

Although Organised corruption is a main persecution engine in only two countries (Colombia and Mexico), it is the third most widespread (after Islamic extremism and Dictatorial paranoia) when its status as a secondary persecution engine is taken into account, showing up 22 times in the WWL 2015. Christians increasingly have to pay a heavy economic price to remain faithful to Christ.

Secular intolerance, as a persecution engine, is registered for only three countries of the WWL 2015 as a secondary persecution engine. This is due to the fact that most countries of the list have a religious majority (other than Christian) with a (very) strong influence of that religion on government and society. In other words, there is hardly any space for humanist-secularist influences. In the group of countries below the fifty countries of the WWL 2015, Secular intolerance manifests itself more distinctly.

Different persecution engines in a country relate to each other in different ways, depending on the country context. Sometimes the different persecution engines nearly 'overlap': it is difficult to discern whether pressure (or violence) originates from one persecution engine or the other. In some cases they 'complement' each other: one type of persecution is active in one part of the country, and others in other parts of the country. In other cases one creates a vacuum for the other(s): what one persecution



engine still leaves open, the other(s) further complete, till the situation becomes unbearable for Christians.

Finally, high scores on the WWL 2015 do not mean that all persecution engines have merged into one 'super-persecution engine'. The characteristics of the different persecution engines (including their specific drivers) remain recognisable, even in situations of very serious persecution. At the same time, the existence of one or very few persecution engines does not mean that persecution is less serious. The severity of persecution does not necessarily rise with the number of persecution engines active in the country. For Christians or churches it does not mean so much which persecution engine is 'biting' them. It is as if this world produces a complexity of power dynamics that turn against them (and thus become 'persecution dynamics or engines'). It also seems that, one way or another, Islamic extremism, as a persecution engine, has the potential to 'open up' other persecution engines to rage against Christians and the church.

### Trends Related to WWL 2015

#### *Cultural Marginalisation as Main Explanation for Increased Persecution*

The WWL 2015 data indicate that, in the reporting period, persecution of Christians has increased. The diagram presents the number of countries where persecution has decreased or increased. While in three countries there was a medium decrease of persecution, in 24 countries persecution clearly increased. This increase was not primarily due to increased violence (smash), but rather to increased pressure on Christians.

Increase or decrease of persecution	Number of countries
High increase of persecution ( $x \geq 7,5$ ) <sup>1/</sup>	8
Medium increase of persecution ( $2,5 \leq x < 7,5$ )	16
Persecution remained more or less the same ( $-2,5 \leq x < 2,5$ )	23
Medium decrease of persecution ( $-7,5 \leq x < -2,5$ )	3

<sup>1/</sup> $x$  = difference of country score between WWL 2014 and WWL 2015

Most of the increase is due to higher pressure (squeeze) on Christians. The average increase in points for the WWL 2015 is 3, and to get into the top 50, the points total is now much higher 48,5 (WWL 2014: 44,7). But the increased scores have mainly come in the five spheres of life through which WWL tracks the more subtle 'squeeze' dimension of persecution – private, family, community, national and church life.

Increase is only to a limited extent due to increase in violence. This is partly linked to the methodology: the highly violent countries already

scored high and there is a clear ceiling to the count of violence: 10 killed or 100 killed or 1000 killed gives the same score in block 6.<sup>7</sup> Higher violence does however influence the squeeze or pressure in the country on Christians and churches.

Still, the fact that the violence has hardly increased is remarkable, though often dreadfully high in countries such as Nigeria, Iraq and Syria. It underlines that the main face of persecution is pressure in the different spheres of life. Violence always rates the greatest headlines, but – as remarked earlier – often the experience of family exclusion, or the loss of a job, or even exclusion of basic social services, is more devastating to a Christian and especially to a new convert. It follows that in most of the top 50 countries, daily life for Christians is getting harder and harder, which means they have been increasingly culturally marginalised.

*Persecution in Relation to Different Profiles of Christians*

In the context of persecution, it makes sense to distinguish the following profiles of Christians.

A. Convert to Christianity	B. Missionary-active Christian	C. Christian by identity
Someone who left his or her former religion or ideological background to become a Christian (can also concern change from one type of Christianity, often the majority type, to another)  'Defectors', who leave the ranks of a criminal organisation after conversion to Christianity, are also part of this profile.	Christian who is active in the public domain by evangelism, or by social or political activities as a Christian	Someone with a Christian identity (or considered a Christian by antagonistic groups such as radical Islamic groups)  This can concern people who live as Christians within the boundaries of regular church life ('passive' Christian lifestyle). It can also concern people who are considered Christians by tradition but hardly know what the Christian faith entails.

Copyrighted Material

Conversion to Christianity often causes hostilities against Christians by dominating religious or ideological groups. Conversion is normally unacceptable for these groups, especially so when that religion or ideology has radicalised, i.e. has created a radical momentum in its midst. WWR takes the concept of conversion in a broad sense so as not to limit it to religion alone. Conversion is leaving his or her religious or ideological

<sup>7</sup> This is the maximum score for Christians killed for faith-related reasons which amounts to 5,56 (= 30 out of 90\*100/6) points.

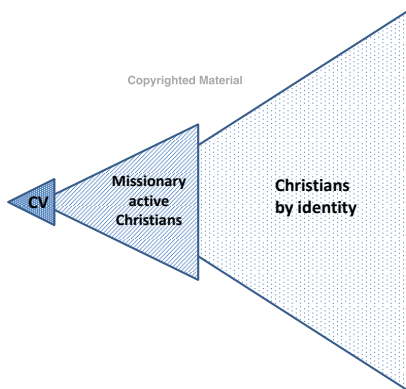
group or even an ‘anti-ideological’ or anarchistic group linked, for instance, to organised crime, to become a Christian.

The second Christian profile is the ‘missionary-active Christian’. These Christians are often active in different forms of evangelisation. Christians can also be active in other forms of witness in the public domain, because they feel driven by their faith. This may concern different aspects of social or political work, such as socio-economic development workers, leaders of public opinion, political leaders, journalists, lawyers, human rights advocates, indigenous rights advocates, etc. Activity in the public domain, be it evangelisation or socio-political work, activates annoyance or causes feelings of threat, while at the same time Christians expose themselves in the local community as potential targets.

The third Christian profile is the ‘Christian by identity’. What you say or do is not important. It is sufficient to be considered a Christian as a reason for being targeted by persecutors. It may happen that people, who hardly know what the Christian faith entails, are pressurised, even killed for being (considered) Christians.

Which Christian profile is affected by persecution depends more on the phase of development of the persecution situation than on the type of persecution engine. Converts are normally the first victims of persecution – for instance, converts to Christianity from a Muslim background. Even when society is not yet Islamised and the government has not yet adopted *shari’a* law, converts are very vulnerable in their private, family and community spheres of life. The same applies to ‘defectors’, even though their community sphere of life is often more problematic than their private and family spheres of life. The next are Christians who are missionary-active in the public domain. When the persecution situation further develops, Christians by identity are affected too. In the end, the visibility of Christianity in the public domain through churches and other Christian buildings is reduced by destruction and closure of buildings.

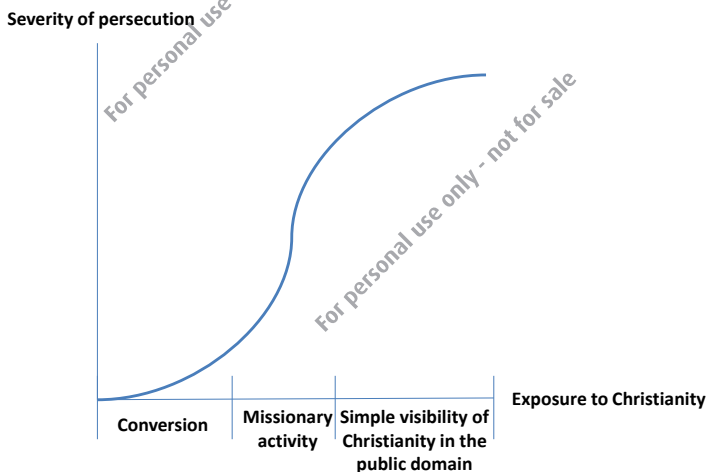
The figure shows how persecution often starts with converts, receives a boost with missionary-active Christians, and culminates with Christians by identity:



In other words, converts set persecution into motion. Once people convert to Christianity, missionary activity is felt more and more as a threat and will thus be suppressed. If the Christian movement continues, all signs of Christianity in the country will be wiped out, be it Christian dress codes or church buildings or other outward signs.

Missionary-active Christians bring persecution into the public domain. While persecution of converts often starts in the inner circles of converts, persecution of missionary-active Christians normally happens in direct relation to public activity. That gives missionary activity a special meaning in the framework of persecution. Missionary activity is a paradoxical reality of the Christian faith. It is the undeniable vocation of Christians and produces the fruits of obedience, but it also crystallises social and governmental tendencies to safeguard vested interests through bitter persecution of these same Christians, and even others who were not involved in missionary activity.

Missionary activity not only brings persecution into the public domain; it also accelerates the dynamics of persecution. The following figure describes this persecution development curve:



Copyrighted Material

The progress of persecution and the 'role' of missionary activity could be compared with the turning-point of a titration curve (chemistry). Gradually increasing numbers of converts might cause a gradually increasing awareness that something is going wrong from the point of view of (religious) social leaders (including government). However, there is a buffer capacity in society for (religious) dissent. Only when things become obvious – converts get a higher profile while missionary activity is visibly present in the public domain – alarm bells might start ringing, and there could be a turning-point in persecution in the sense that it suddenly seems

to increase disproportionately. The sheer visibility in the public domain of Christians, churches and other Christian buildings gives the final push to the development of persecution.

### **Conclusion**

After a decline in persecution in the first decennium of the 21st century, persecution increased seriously at the start of its second decennium. The last year of this period, registered by WWL 2015, shows an acceleration of this trend.

Over the 23 annual WWLs, persecution of Christians has been most intense in the United Nations Asia-Pacific Group, followed by the African Group, where persecution increased strongly in East Africa. West-Central Africa took off in the second decennium of the 21st century, and further increased with WWL 2015. Persecution in the Asia-Pacific Group increased strongly in the Middle East and South-East Asia.

Islamic extremism is the most prominent persecution engine among the countries considered in this chapter. The combination of Communist oppression & Dictatorial paranoia follows. It is the most prominent main persecution engine in South-East Asia and Central Asia and the Caucasus.

At a more detailed level, the WWL 2015 data indicate that the increase of persecution of Christians is only to a limited extent due to increase in violence ('smash'). The main face of persecution is pressure in the different spheres of life ('squeeze'). In most of the top 50 countries, daily life for Christians is getting harder and harder, which means they have been increasingly culturally marginalised.

The more the persecution situation develops, the more it involves the different Christian profiles, starting with converts to Christianity, then passing on to missionary-active Christians, to eventually include Christians by identity. While converts are the first to be persecuted, missionary-active Christians bring persecution into the public domain. Missionary activity also accelerates the dynamics of persecution.

# MISSION AND ETHICS OF MISSION 2014

Christian Troll and Thomas Schirmmacher

## Part I: An Intra-Christian Ethical Code for Missions

*Christian Troll SJ, Thomas Schirmmacher*

Since 2006 the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the departments within the World Council of Churches and World Evangelical Alliance responsible for the relationship with other religions have worked on an ethical code for mission. Christian Troll SJ and Thomas Schirmmacher participated in the latest consultations in Bangkok, which have led to the document entitled 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World – Recommendations for Conduct'.<sup>1</sup> The first part of this essay<sup>2</sup> is an introduction to this important process.<sup>3</sup>

The question of ethics in mission has in recent years increasingly been raised in intra-Christian dialogue<sup>4</sup> as well as in relationships between religions.<sup>5</sup> However, a political question has also been asked, and that is the extent to which the human right of religious freedom,<sup>6</sup> including the right to

---

<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world>

<sup>2</sup> The following article by a Catholic and a Protestant author was published in German as an introduction to the printed German version of the ecumenical code 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World – Recommendations for Conduct' in the journal 'Materialdienst' [Vol. 74 (2011), issue 8, 293-95 (text of the code 295-99)] by the Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen (Protestant Central Office for World View Questions) of the Protestant Church in Germany. Translated by Dr Richard McClary.

<sup>3</sup> For the success of this document being used worldwide by all confessions, see my report: 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World – Three Years On', in *Current Dialogue* 56 (December 2014), 67-79: [www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/current-dialogue-magazine/current-dialogue-56](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/current-dialogue-magazine/current-dialogue-56)

<sup>4</sup> See Elmer Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism: A Philosophical Defence of Proselytizing and Persuasion* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 2011). See also Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Spe salvi*, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> All codes on mission existing worldwide – secular, religious or Christian – are discussed and compared in Matthew K. Richards, Are L. Svendsen and Rainer Bless, 'Codes of Conduct for Religious Persuasion. The Legal Practice and Best Practices', in *International Journal for Religious Freedom* (Cape Town) 3 (2010) 2, 65-104.

<sup>6</sup> Cf the international academic consultation at the State University of Bamberg: Marianne Heimbach-Steins and Heiner Bielefeldt (eds), *Religionen und Religionsfreiheit. Menschenrechtliche Perspektiven im Spannungsfeld von Mission und Konversion* (Würzburg, Germany: 2010).

public self-expression on the part of religions and the right to religious conversion, may and must be limited by other human rights.<sup>7</sup>

The first consultation in Lariano, Italy, in 2006 was interreligious. There, representatives of Christian denominations listened to adherents of different religions. In the end, there was a joint avowal of religious freedom as well as an intra-Christian operational programme.

When the second consultation took place in Toulouse, France, in 2007, it involved an intra-Christian assembly. The goal was to find a joint direction as well as to establish a problem catalogue and a questionnaire. Questions relating to family, school, education, social and medical care, the economy, politics, legislation and violence were discussed. In the end, there was a rough outline for the impending document.<sup>8</sup> A list was made of which means were to be qualified as unethical with respect to mission and thus were to be rejected. Included among them were the use of violence, threats, drugs or brainwashing, and also providing material advantages or the use of the police or army to propagate a religion. From a Christian point of view, such an ethical code for mission should more precisely label forms of abuse of religious freedom, and not least and at the same time, offer assistance to politicians and governments.

A small group of about nine staff members of the Holy See, the World Council of Churches, and the World Evangelical Alliance met regularly in Geneva, Bossey and Rome from 2006 to 2011. As a result, they progressively formulated a recommended text, which in 2010 was sent to various church leaders, member-churches and commissions. Innumerable suggestions were evaluated and incorporated. The entire process was organised by three bodies – first, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), to which archbishops and other church leaders from Asia and Africa belonged; second, the Office on Interreligious Relations and Dialogue of the World Council of Churches (IRRD), whose delegation also included representatives of oriental, Orthodox and Pentecostal churches, in addition to evangelical church leaders. Thirdly, on behalf of the World Evangelical Alliance, the Religious Liberty Commission (RLC) and the Theological Commission were active. Because of the inclusion of

Copyrighted Material

<sup>7</sup> See the Oslo Declaration signed by all religions in Norway, along with experts from the academic field: *Oslo Declaration, Missionary Activities and Human Rights: Recommended Ground Rules for Missionary Activities*: [www.oslocoalition.org/mhr.php](http://www.oslocoalition.org/mhr.php) (5th July 2011).

<sup>8</sup> The programme is spelt out in the opening plenary in Toulouse: Thomas Schirmacher, “‘But with gentleness and respect’. Why missions should be ruled by ethics?” (short version), in *Current Dialogue* (WCC) 50 (February 2008), 55-66; long version at: [www.worldevangelicals.org/news/article.htm?id=1372](http://www.worldevangelicals.org/news/article.htm?id=1372) (5th July 2011); German version: “‘Mit Sanftmut und Ehrerbietung’. Warum die Mission von der Ethik bestimmt sein muss”, in Klaus W. Müller (ed), *Menschenrechte – Freiheit – Mission* (Nürnberg 2010), 97-119.

numerous church leaders from all continents, quick results were not to be expected.

For the purpose of the third intra-Christian consultation, experts and high-ranking church leaders met 25th-28th January, 2011 in Bangkok for the sole purpose of working intensively on the final text. After the Bangkok meeting, only minor details in the text were amended by the highest committees of the three respective bodies through mutual agreement.

All denominations which speak out for and advocate religious liberty are concerned that within Christianity there are joint discussions about the limits of religious freedom as well as about unethical methods of mission work. At the same time, everyone is aware of the fact that there are problems in all confessions and thus in this respect a self-critical intra-Christian dialogue is called for.

Christian witness essentially includes presenting one's own faith unfeigned to another. However, this is to be done in a peaceful way and with deep respect for the dignity of other individuals. People who possibly want to become Christian should do this out of conviction and not in a calculating manner. They should have the opportunity to consider their decision and to make it freely and in utter trust in God. All forms of Christian witness and evangelisation which do not adhere to these criteria and injure human dignity and human rights in one way or another are to be resolutely rejected as contradicting the good news of Christianity.

The code of conduct at hand does not have a canonical character. Situations in different countries and cultures are in fact so different that short, succinct statements can often not do them justice. For that reason, general guidelines have been formulated for the code.

The code of conduct is in any event an unambiguous indication of the fact that the vast majority of the global Christian community clearly distances itself from every form of mission work that seeks to coerce or manipulate with psychological, financial or physical might and power. Mission work is only justifiable within the framework of correctly understood religious freedom. It is based on the conviction that it is part of the basic dignity of an individual to be able to decide freely and after careful consideration for a faith or worldview one holds to be true and views to be compulsory for oneself. Daily we see people on television who use force or unfair means to spread their religion, or at least attempt to do so.

In the course of its history, Christianity has in multiple cases employed dishonest means and has to be on guard against any relapse into former attitudes and behavioural patterns. We thus view it as an extremely welcome and long overdue sign that Christians now jointly and officially declare that such methods are immoral and unchristian, and thus contradict and distort the true sense of mission. Furthermore, they publicly oblige themselves to follow the principles named in the code as well as allowing their actions to be measured by them.



Paul calls upon believers in 1 Peter 3:15-17 to answer everyone's questions and to clearly defend one's own 'hope', also towards those who wish us evil. However, they should do this with 'gentleness and respect'. People who do not hold to their convictions are not genuine partners in a serious dialogue, but there is a world of difference between peaceful and respectful propagation and a forcible spreading of one's own convictions which does not respect the dignity of others. Christian witness is not an ethics-free area; it requires an ethical foundation which is biblically based, so that we truly do what Christ has assigned us to do.

Umbrella organisations have been founded by the Catholic Church, the National Council of Churches, and the National Evangelical Alliances in India and Malaysia. These organisations face the state with a single voice, especially when it comes to questions relating to mission work and laws against conversion formulated to oppose them. Ostracised and discriminated against by unjust laws, Christian confessions do not work against each other but rather with and for each other.

In recent decades there have been developments in all denominations which have made this affiliation possible in the first place. On the Catholic side, this began with the Declaration on Religious Freedom at the Second Vatican Council. It awards state power sole concern for secular public welfare, and once and for all rejects the idea of a 'Catholic state' as being contradictory to religious freedom. This also includes the dismantling of prior enemy stereotypes and controversial topics between the World Council of Churches and Evangelicals – thanks to an evangelical missiology which has become self-critical, and an enhanced focus on thoughts relating to mission over against political topics found in ecumenism. In the process, churches in the global South have been leading the way in building a bridge between the camps.

## **Part II: Nine Ethical Restraints on Missions**

***Thomas Schirmmacher***

The second part is written by Thomas Schirmmacher alone, even though it takes into account a lot of the arguments from discussions with Christian Troll and discussions between the Vatican, WCC and WEA.

What I want to do here, is to summarise the Biblical argument, that back the document 'Christian Witness' and are found in many ecumenical documents of the last years, especially those published by the Catholic Church, the WCC and WEA.<sup>9</sup> This is possible, as the arguments concerning

---

<sup>9</sup> See especially 'Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes' (2012): <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/mission-and-evangelism/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changing-landscapes> – and see also Pope Francis: *Evangelii Gaudium* (2014):

ethics of mission are very similar and do not constitute an area where there is much theological disagreement between these world bodies.

The code of conduct is unambiguous proof that the overwhelming majority of Christians around the world distance themselves from every type of mission work which seeks to coerce or manipulate people by the use of psychological, financial or physical power and force. Mission work is only defensible within the framework of a correctly understood form of freedom of religion. It is based on the conviction that a central aspect of human dignity is one's ability to decide freely and specifically after careful deliberation for that faith or worldview which an individual considers to be true and binding for him or her.

*The Christian Movement has Grown Spiritually,  
Becoming More Peaceful*

In the past, Christians demanded that people leave another religion and convert to Christianity but did not allow Christians to leave the faith (as some religions still do not), punishing apostasy with civil penalties – including losing family, civil rights, reputation, jobs, or even one's life. In that situation, in Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist societies, not changing one's religion was more often due to societal pressure than due to conviction. In the course of history, probably more people were forced to accept a religion than those who freely chose their religion. We are still experiencing the end of this situation (called the 'Constantinian Era' in Christian history), which includes the end of safeguarding Christianity by political means, and forcing or manipulating people into the church by political, economic, or any external pressures. Most Christians think this is spiritual growth, not a catastrophe. The Christian faith can live by the Word of God through the power of the Holy Spirit; real faith does not come from worldly powers, whether armies, governments, or business.

Generally speaking, Christianity and churches have taken the right path over the past hundred years. They have increasingly renounced force and refrained from participation in wars and civil wars, and in mission work they have refrained from the use of political means and economic pressure. I am not saying that there are no longer any bad situations, but if one were to compare 2015 with the situation about 100 years earlier, then situations such as that in Northern Ireland or the so-called Christian terror organisation *National Liberation Front of Tripura* (NLFT) in northeast India and the rebels in Nagaland are side issues in Christianity. Nowadays, there is hardly anyone within the world of Christianity who endorses force in the spread of their message. We have here the exact opposite of what we find in Islam. In Islam, the endorsement of force by Islamists in order to

conquer the world has even found an entrée in Muslim society in locations where groups have been co-existing peacefully for hundreds of years.

The forced conversion of the Saxons by the German Emperor or the Goa Inquisition in India is history. We Christians are glad of that, as it ranks among the darker sides of church history. Nowadays, there are millions of people who become Christians who do not come from a Christian background. And they do this out of pure conviction without any pressure. There are more people converting to Christianity than at times when Christians allowed their message to be adulterated by violent dissemination. What the gunboats of western colonial powers in China did not achieve is today being achieved by the message of the Gospel without outside help.<sup>10</sup>

### *Restraint: The Love of the Triune God<sup>11</sup>*

Ethics and mission belong together. Christian witness does not occur in some sort of area free of ethics; it requires an ethical foundation so that we truly do what Christ has instructed us to do.

When people see every day on television that specific religious groups are prepared to employ force, violence, or even killing, to advance their efforts, then we Christians have to explicitly say which means we will never use – and state that Christians who nevertheless use these means lose the right to call their methods ‘Christian’ or ‘mission work’.

The more a description of God moves away from his actual essence of love, the less can this God be compared with the Christian God. The less ‘the greatest command’ stands in the centre – ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength’ (Deut. 6:4-5), along with ‘The other is this: ‘... love your neighbour as yourself’ (Lev. 19:18), and ‘There is no commandment greater than these’ (Mark 12:29-31) – the further away one is from God, as a Christian or as a non-Christian. ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:8), and that is why he sent Jesus for the purpose of redemption and for faith (John 3:16). In consequence, the true God is not a distant, triumphal God, but the one who humbled himself (Phil. 2:5-11) out of love for humankind.<sup>12</sup>

In my view, the indispensability of the teaching on the Trinity rests mainly on this justification: God was love prior to all creation, namely, between Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. He did not first have to create a

<sup>10</sup> Natan Lerner, ‘Proselytism, Change of Religion, and International Human Rights’, in *Emory International Law Review* 477 (1998), 483.

<sup>11</sup> See as an historic example, Thomas Schirrmacher, *Advocate of Love – Martin Bucer as Theologian and Pastor: Achieving Unity through Listening to the Scriptures and Each Other* (World of Theology Series 5. Bonn: VKW, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> See Thomas Schirrmacher, *The Koran and the Bible* (World of Theology Series 7. Bonn: VKW, 2013): [www.bucer.de/ressourcen/wea-cd.html](http://www.bucer.de/ressourcen/wea-cd.html)

counterpart in order to actually be able to love. Rather, love is the basic design of creation. It lies established in the fact that the world was created by a God who is eternal love. And this is a practical implementation of his love relationships.

For love to be effective, there always have to be at least two parties involved. There always has to be a counterpart. A God who is not triune can for that reason first love when a counterpart has been created. Therefore, post-biblical Judaism, Islam and other monotheistic religions have a more difficult time in describing the love of God as an essential characteristic of God present prior to creation. The God of the Bible always has a counterpart in himself: John 17:24 describes the love of God for the Son prior to the creation of the world: 'Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.' For that reason, the eternal, internal Trinitarian love is the epitome of love and the starting-point of all Christian love and ethics.

Therefore, mission cannot get around the question of the ethics of love. Mission efforts without love are not part of mission at all.

### *Restraint: A Way of Gentleness is Pursued*

Whoever assumes to have found the 'truth' in Jesus – and that this is the truth about our relationship to God and how we find peace with God through grace, forgiveness, and redemption – and whoever invokes the written revelation of the Judeo-Christian tradition, has to simultaneously take everything regarding content and demeanour into consideration which represents serious restraints on a conversation with someone who thinks differently. 'Speaking the truth in love' (Eph. 4:15) belong together, also in dialogue and in missionary witness.

The classical justification of all Christian apologetics is found in 1 Peter 3:15b-16: 'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason [Greek: *apologia*] for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.' Standing up for the truth in apologetics and expressing gentle love go hand-in-hand.

As much as we have to give a reason for our faith, style and our own example play a role in the process.

Gentleness is not only an inevitable consequence of the fact that Christians proclaim the God of love and should love their neighbour and want to love their enemy. Rather, it is also a consequence of knowing that Christians are themselves pardoned sinners. Our counterpart has to be reconciled with our Creator and not with us. For that reason, we can always step back, admit our own finiteness and shortcomings, and clearly point out that we can only claim authority towards the other insofar as we genuinely

and understandably proclaim the good news. Esteem is a consequence of the fact that we look at people with God's eyes, i.e. as his creatures, as images of God. That prohibits us from treating anyone as sub-human or as mentally inferior.

A Christian does not have an answer to every question. Rather, he can only defend God's message where God has revealed himself throughout the course of history in word and in Christ. Jesus kept God's command and the commands of men within the respective religious traditions and cultures strictly apart (e.g. Mark 7:1-15). Therefore, a Christian can learn a lot from his discussion partner without automatically having to make reductions in central questions of his faith.

In 1 Peter 3 one finds a form of complementarity. On the one hand, there is the need to witness, if not apologetics (in the Greek text one finds the word *apologia*, which originally was a speech in court presented in one's defence). On the other hand, there is the need for 'gentleness and respect' – respect for the dignity of the other person. The dignity of a person does not make us hide our hope but rather speak about it clearly, explain it, and defend it. And yet, questions behind which bad intentions lie may never permit us to treat the dignity of our discussion partner with contempt. Both sides complement each other, and they represent indispensable fundamental building blocks of our faith.

According to 1 Peter 3, people do not speak directly with God when they speak with us. On the one hand, we can certainly be God's ambassadors and bear witness about the hope that is in us. And yet, on the other hand, we are also only humans saved through God's grace and not by our own virtue. We long to see people find peace with God, receive his forgiveness, and trust God as the sole truth. However, they have not sinned against us. They should not bow before us, and we are not the truth and are not in possession of the truth in *everything* we say. No Christian is a 'Dr Know-It-All'.

Christians always look at other people as images of God, even if they have completely different intentions. People's human rights are not derived from the fact that they are Christians. Rather, it comes from the fact that they are men and women whom God has created as equal people. There are religions which only grant human rights to their own members, but Christians also defend the human rights of their enemies – and pray for them and love them.

### *Restraint: No Forced Conversions*

Is a forced conversion a true conversion? I believe that at this point all Christian denominations are in agreement that a conversion has to be a deep, personal stirring of the heart which is thought through to the end. A forced conversion is not something we desire or which we can accept as a conversion. So, when people say to us that they want to convert, we have to

grant them time to decide; we should not hastily baptise them. Instead, we should be sure that they truly know what they are doing.<sup>13</sup>

Honesty and transparency should also hold sway as far as what the Christian faith is and what is expected of Christians after their conversion. Christianity is not a secret circle. Rather, it is open to the public. We have nothing to hide (Matt. 10:26-27). Jesus said to those who wanted to become his followers: ‘Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?’ (Luke 14:28; see also verses 27-33). We should help people count the cost and not prematurely plug them into Christian churches, only to see that they later find that they were misled.

At the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church said the following in its document ‘Ad Gentes’ of 1965: ‘The Church strictly forbids forcing anyone to embrace the Faith, or alluring or enticing people by worrisome wiles.’<sup>14</sup>

What could fall into this unethical category? Here are some examples:

- Bribing people with money, goods, medical care, opportunities or offices – i.e. offering rewards for their conversion which are not of a spiritual nature.
- Threatening legal consequences, using inappropriate psychological pressure or compulsion so that people make decisions which they are unable to take stock of because they are, for example, too young or psychologically ill.
- Exploiting the authority of a state function when in office (e.g. as a member of the police or as a teacher at a state school).
- Granting or denying financial advantages (e.g. via banks or inheritance law).
- Preaching before an ‘involuntary public’ which does not possess any freedom to remove themselves from the situation (e.g. army officers in front of their soldiers, or a prison officer in front of prisoners).

The World Council of Churches has named the following examples in its document entitled *The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness*:

- ‘... employing any kind of physical violence, moral compulsion or psychological pressure, e.g. the use of certain advertising techniques in mass media that might bring undue pressure on readers/viewers.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Schirmacher, *May a Christian Go to Court?* (WEA Global Issues Series 3, Bonn: VKW, 2008), 63-76.

<sup>14</sup> Degree “Ad Gentes”: On the Mission Activity of the Church’ (1965): [www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651207\\_ad-gentes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html); see the commentary in Christian W. Troll, ‘Das Konzil und die Entwicklung der katholischen Sicht des Islams’, in Dirk Ansorge (ed), *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil* (Frankfurter Theologische Studien, Vol. 70, Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2013), 261-314.

- using political, social and economic power as a means of winning new members for one's own church.
- extending explicit or implicit offers of education, health care or material inducements or using financial resources with the intent of making converts.
- manipulative attitudes and practices that exploit people's needs, weaknesses or lack of education especially in situations of distress, and fail to respect their freedom and human dignity'<sup>15</sup>

What is to be condemned includes force, compulsion, threats, harassment and enticements – lies and twisting the facts in order to win people for Christ who would otherwise not follow him.

Some Christians differentiate between proselytism (as illegitimate) and evangelisation (as legitimate). Yet the border varies from one group to the next. For example, the Patriarch of Moscow has repeatedly condemned what he considers Catholic proselytism among Orthodox Christians in Russia. However, the Catholic Church maintains that it is only supporting the existing community of Catholic believers in Russia and is not conducting proselytism.<sup>16</sup> The World Council of Churches said once: 'In the history of the church the term 'proselytism' used to be a positive term and was even used as an equivalent designation for missions activities. In more recent times, in particular in the context of the modern ecumenical movement, it has gained a negative connotation.'<sup>17</sup>

We need a clarification of the language of mission. Not only because the use of belligerent language can easily sound as though unethical means are being employed but also because incorrect theological language can get us into trouble. For years, the World Evangelical Alliance as well as the very successful Asian Evangelical Alliance have banned belligerent language from the vocabulary of the church and mission. For instance, the Salvation Army has renamed its 'War Cry' magazine and large mission agencies which used the word 'crusade' have changed their name, while the

---

<sup>15</sup> *The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness*, Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches (Gemeinsame Arbeitsgruppe des Weltkirchenrates und der Römisch-Katholischen Kirche), §19, 25th September 1995: [www.oikoumene.org/de/dokumentation/documents/oerk-kommissionen/gemeinsame-arbeitsgruppe-der-roemisch-katholischen-kirche-und-des-oerk/25-09-95-challenge-of-proselytism.html](http://www.oikoumene.org/de/dokumentation/documents/oerk-kommissionen/gemeinsame-arbeitsgruppe-der-roemisch-katholischen-kirche-und-des-oerk/25-09-95-challenge-of-proselytism.html); a similar list can be found at: *Towards Common Witness: A call to adopt responsible relationships in mission and to renounce proselytism*. WCC-Kommission 'Mission und Evangelisation', 19th September 1997: [www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/mission-and-evangelism/19-09-97-towards-common-witness.html](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/mission-and-evangelism/19-09-97-towards-common-witness.html)

<sup>16</sup> 'Russian patriarch renews complaints on Catholic "proselytism"', 5th October 2006: [http://directionstoorthodoxy.org/mod/news/view.php?article\\_id=198](http://directionstoorthodoxy.org/mod/news/view.php?article_id=198) and 'Moscow's Catholic Archbishop Responds to Alexy II's Accusations', 15th February 2002: [www.zenit.org/article-3698?l=english](http://www.zenit.org/article-3698?l=english)

<sup>17</sup> *The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness*.



Worldwide Evangelization Crusade was changed to the Worldwide Evangelization for Christ, and Campus Crusade for Christ was changed, even if somewhat awkwardly, to 'CRU'.<sup>18</sup>

### *Restraint: Peace*

In 2007, 138 Muslim leaders wrote a remarkable letter to the major Christian leaders worldwide.<sup>19</sup> On behalf of the World Evangelical Alliance, I pointed out in its reply letter<sup>20</sup> the central meaning of peacemaking:

We do not want there to be any doubt that we as Christians want to live together with Muslims in peace, as we want to do the same with all men and women in the world. That is a characteristic trait of our religion, even if we do not live and have not always lived consistently with what God commands and what is commanded in our written revelation. We regret the actions taken by Christians in the past and the present which do not correspond to the teachings and example of Jesus. In Matthew 5:9-11 Jesus commands us: 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.' In Luke 10:5, Jesus commands: 'When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.''' And James, the brother of Jesus, quite correctly points out the words of his brother when he says: 'Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness' (James 3:18). Paul, the Apostle of Christ, also writes similarly in Romans 12:17-18: 'Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.' In 1 Timothy 2:1-2, Paul expands this command to include the world of politics: 'I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.' Be assured that we support any efforts which would promote peace in this unpeaceful world. We are very prepared to speak about that which promotes unrest and to search for ways to live together peacefully. Let's talk about our differences in direct conversations and attempt to convince each other with good arguments, without militancy and threats of violence and to go beyond differences in political strategies or the courses of action followed by governments.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> All should note the leadership of the Evangelical Fellowship of India in this area. See their *Statement on Mission Language* (October 2000): [www.missionmanual.org/index.php?loc=kb&view=v&id=13826&fto=703&](http://www.missionmanual.org/index.php?loc=kb&view=v&id=13826&fto=703&)

<sup>19</sup> [www.acommonword.com/the-acw-document](http://www.acommonword.com/the-acw-document)

<sup>20</sup> [www.acommonword.com/category/site/christian-responses](http://www.acommonword.com/category/site/christian-responses) – click letter No. 51.

<sup>21</sup> See also Christian W. Troll 'The Ethical and Political Dimensions of Dialogue', in: *Al-Maarif* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, January-June 2012), 21-41.



### *Restraint: Religious Freedom*

At no time in human history has there been a country in the world which has produced peace between religions so that the religions have come to agreement over their differences and have united with each other or have dispensed with every claim to truth. Normally it has been and is precisely the other way around. When religions decide to dispense with violence, coercion or political pressure, this serves to produce a platform upon which religious groups exist alongside each other in spite of all the differences and are able to enter into dialogue with each other. In doing so, each religious community exercises its faith to the full extent and is allowed to spread it. Furthermore, all the members of such a society are free to choose which religion they want to follow and which they do not want to follow.<sup>22</sup>

Also, in the case of Christianity and of Islam, it is apparent that unity has not been achieved between different theological schools. One can, for instance, think about the differences between Shi'ite and Sunni Islam or between Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic Christianity. Whenever these different schools are in a position to co-exist peacefully in the same country, the reason is not because they agree about everything. Rather, it is either because they have been forced by the state to co-exist peacefully (which hardly represents a permanent solution), or because they have themselves decided to limit their differences to the area of theology and to discussions about the faith, and have decided to not argue it out in the political realm.

Peace in the political realm cannot be required via theological uniformity.<sup>23</sup> On the contrary, it is obvious that individual governments can also conduct war against each other when they share the same religious convictions. Instead, we have to acknowledge that religious freedom is a basic right for all people, in particular for those, however, who are at variance with our own convictions.<sup>24</sup>

In its resolution for religious freedom, the World Evangelical Alliance expresses it as follows: 'The WEA differentiates between advocating the rights of members of other or no religions and endorsing the truth of their beliefs. Advocating the freedom of others can be done without accepting the truth of what they believe.'<sup>25</sup>

Copyrighted Material

<sup>22</sup> Paul M. Taylor, *Freedom of Religion: UN and European Human Rights Law and Practice* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005); Burkhard Guntau, 'Möglichkeit und Grenzen der Religionsfreiheit', *Materialdienst der EZW* 70, 9 (2007), 325-36.

<sup>23</sup> See Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> See Heiner Bielefeldt, *Freedom of Religion and Belief* (Religious Freedom Series 3, Bonn: VKW, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> 'Resolution on Religious Freedom and Solidarity with the Persecuted Church of the World Evangelical Alliance' (30th October 2008): [www.iirf.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/PDFs/WEA\\_Res\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.iirf.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/PDFs/WEA_Res_ENG.pdf)

### *Restraint: No Fundamentalism*

The relation to other religions should be free from fundamentalism, whereby I do not define fundamentalism as a truth claim *per se*. Rather, as a sociologist, I define fundamentalism as a militant truth claim.<sup>26</sup> In my opinion, one should only speak about fundamentalism if violence and threats are involved or if a true danger for internal security exists. For this reason, fundamentalism does not mean to work from the standpoint of the existence of truth or to believe to know it in part or to pass it on to others. Rather, fundamentalism is a militant truth claim which derives its claim to power from non-disputable, superior revelation, people, values or ideologies. It is aimed against religious freedom and calls for peace and justifies, urges, or uses non-state or state-based non-democratic force in order to accomplish its goals.

One of the most important steps of progress in modern constitutional states is that the state alone has a monopoly on the legitimate use of force and that this has been withdrawn from individual religions and worldview communities. Through recourse to final truths, fundamentalism delivers the wrong grounds for deviating from such monopoly.

Force applied internally towards its own members is also part of fundamentalist violence, so that the adherents stick to the party line. The same goes for those who break away, be it in order to punish them or to ostracise them, or to keep them from breaking away.

I defend the idea that a religious and worldview community standing for, propagating, and in practice *defending the freedom of religion*, cannot be fundamentalist and should not be so named!

For that reason, my definition, which I have defended as a sociologist of religion through the use of many examples in my book *Fundamentalism*, is: 'Fundamentalism is a militant truth claim which derives its claim to power from non-disputable, higher revelation, people, values, or ideologies. It is aimed against religious freedom and against calls for peace and justifies, urges, or uses non-state or state-based non-democratic force in order to accomplish its goals. In the process it often invokes opposition to certain achievements of modernity in favor of historical grandeur and bygone eras, and at the same time it uses these modern achievements mostly in order to extend and produce a modern variation of older religions and worldviews.'

The reverse also applies. The rejection of religious freedom is a clear indicator of a fundamentalist orientation, albeit not the sole indicator.

---

<sup>26</sup> I have spelled this out in detail in my book *Fundamentalism: When Religion becomes Dangerous* (WEA Global Issues Series 14. Bonn: VKW, 2013): [www.bucer.de/ressourcen/wea-cd.html](http://www.bucer.de/ressourcen/wea-cd.html)

### *Restraint: We Are Not the Judges*

Christians are happy that God himself is the judge and that every final judgement is reserved for him. Only God himself can look into a person's heart, and in the end we do not know his final judgement, for 'Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart' (1 Sam. 16:7).

God has forbidden us from carrying out any type of sentence on our critics and from punishing people for their 'unbelief'. Jonah also experienced that God was more merciful than Jonah himself who would have preferred to have seen judgement upon Nineveh (Jon. 4:1-10). And Jesus clearly rejected the thinking of his disciples to have fire sent down from heaven upon villages which spurned him (Luke 9:51-56). Christians who proclaim the message might regret with bleeding hearts that other people reject the offer of redemption in Christ, but they never have the right to declare these people to be less than human, to attack them with words, to stir up the state powers to hatred against them, to entreat judgement against them, or to carry out such judgement!

Only the state possesses this monopoly on power which, however, neither has the task of proclaiming the Gospel nor of enlarging the Christian church. Indeed, it is to refrain from questions of conscience and of religion. Conversely, as 'God's servant', it is to expressly punish Christians who do evil (Rom. 13:1-7). The state only has to protect Christians insofar as it should protect all who do good, and in the cause of justice and peace it is to prevent people who plan violence or exercises it, regardless of whether they are religiously motivated or not.

### *Restraint: Neither Racism nor Cultural Imperialism*

There should be no claim to the superiority of one's own culture over other cultures behind truth claims. Unfortunately, what can easily arise is a feeling of superiority through conversations with other cultures, through conversations with other religions, and through conversations regarding political questions. For instance, this can be demonstrated in Germany when there are discussions about fellow citizens who are Turkish. Here Christians should finely distinguish and make clear that knowing the truth of Jesus does not make them infallible in questions of culture and politics. Indeed, they are citizens among citizens just like everyone else. Colonialism and racism have to be kept at a distance from Christian proclamation!<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> See in detail Thomas Schirrmacher, Richard Howell, *Racism. With an essay on Caste in India* (Bonn: VKW, 2012).

*Restraint: No Lies or Distortions*

For the very reason that Christians are obliged to speak the truth, they have to carefully pay attention when in dialogue that they do not manipulate their partner in conversation, speak slanderously, or use rumours or lies. The eighth of the Ten Commandments also directly applies in encounters with other religions.

I have written a book carrying the title *Islam: A Stereotypical Enemy*,<sup>28</sup> in which I come to the defence of Muslims against false accusations – illustrated by those made by the small political party the Christian Center (German: *Christliche Mitte*). In the light of my critical publications on the relationship between Islam and human rights, some people find it astonishing. However, as a Christian, I will come to the defence of anyone in the face of defamation. This is due to the fact that also towards Islam – or over against Communism – the following applies: ‘You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour’ (Ex. 20:16).

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

Copyrighted Material

---

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Schirmacher, *Feindbild Islam* (Nürnberg, VTR: 2003).

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

# SECTION THREE

## CASE STUDIES

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

# EGYPT – THE CHURCH UNDER PRESSURE

Cornelis Hulsman<sup>1</sup> and Ramez Atallah

Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt have a diverse history with moments of great hardship and great prosperity. Among Muslims, Hugh Goddard identified three main attitudes towards Christianity in classical Islamic thought consisting of irenic, neutral and antagonistic views still central among segments of Egypt's population today. Among Egypt's Christians, hardships and fortunes tend to be explained in terms of a spiritual battle between good and evil.

The following chapter provides a historical overview of Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt by Cornelis Hulsman, and to this Ramez Atallah provides a first-hand account of the fortunes and pressures facing Egypt's Christian population following the 25th January 2011 Revolution.

## The Christian Period Prior to Islam

Egyptians are mentioned as present during Pentecost that led to the beginning of the church and references to Alexandria can be found in the Book of Acts, indicating early Christian contacts with Egyptians.<sup>2</sup> This is further highlighted in the first century by the preaching of the Apostle Mark in Alexandria. Additionally, the Holy Family tradition developed around Matthew chap 2 and remains central to the self-understanding of the Coptic Orthodox Church.<sup>3</sup>

Stephen Davis provides a vivid description of the first centuries of Christianity in Egypt in his book *The Early Coptic Papacy*. From its first historical origins the church underwent Roman persecution, struggles with non-Christians and divisions within the church, but also witnessed great leaders who had an impact on the universal church. At the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451), a major schism occurred when Alexandrian Church leaders rejected the Chalcedonian formulation about the nature of Jesus Christ. Following this, Christians in Egypt divided into Chalcedonians and

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank R.A. Forster and J. Coffee for their helpful comments in writing this chapter, Prof. H. Suermann for reading the draft text, and Dr Anas Aboshady for responding to questions about the Covenant of Omar.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 6:9 mentions Jews from Alexandria opposed to the Gospel. Acts 18:24-28 mentions Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria preaching in Ephesus. In Acts 28: 11 Paul sailed in a ship from Alexandria. It is likely he spoke with the crew about Jesus.

<sup>3</sup> G. Gabra (ed), *Be Thou There; The Holy Family's Journey in Egypt* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2001).



anti-Chalcedonians. This was a time of social and theological fragmentation in Egypt.<sup>4</sup>

Between AD 476 and 628 the Byzantine Empire fought a number of battles with the Persians, ultimately resulting in Persian defeat and a greatly weakened Byzantine Empire. Thus, when the first Muslims arrived, they found both a divided Christian faith and a weakened emperor no longer able to defend his lands.

The pre-Islamic period was of great importance for the formation of Egypt's Christian identity and it deeply influenced the belief that persecution – by necessity – is a consequence of Christian faith. Church leaders have repeatedly used this belief to strengthen their position by stressing internal security in a world largely perceived as hostile to Christians. Thus, they strengthened the distinction between fellow believers and those not part of the same religious community.<sup>5</sup>

### Conquest or Liberation?

When the Arabs arrived in AD 638-642, Egypt was an important province of the Byzantine Empire. Different views of this event are evident in the terms used to refer to it. 'Conquest' is typically used by non-Muslims, whereas Muslims generally speak of the 'Islamic Opening' of Egypt.

The pre-Islamic persecution of Christians in Egypt was and remains used by Muslims to frame the Muslim role as the liberator. The Byzantines, during the 'opening' attempted to defend their territory. The Alexandrian Church, which later became the Coptic Orthodox Church, appears to be mostly indifferent to the conquest, at least initially, and later became more positive when they saw Coptic Orthodox Patriarch Benjamin returned to Alexandria from exile and the Muslim ruler 'Amr Ibn al-'Ās hand control of a large number of Byzantine churches over to the Coptic Orthodox Church.<sup>6</sup>

Over time, Christian inhabitants of Egypt were called *Qibt* – an abbreviation from the Greek *Aegyptos*, i.e. the word Copt means 'Egyptian'. Over the ages the word has become synonymous with Egypt's Christians.

Furthermore, 'Amr Ibn al-'Ās granted Egypt's Christians, under the leadership of Pope Benjamin, a considerable measure of autonomy in

<sup>4</sup> S.J. Davis, *The Early Coptic Papacy; The Egyptian Church and Its Leadership in Late Antiquity* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2004), 139.

<sup>5</sup> Davis, *The Early Coptic Papacy*. I discussed the book with Prof. O. F. Meinardus after its publication. Meinardus drew a line between the use of the self-perception of martyrdom by early Coptic Patriarchs and Pope Shenouda (1971-2012) who strongly promoted the cult of saints and martyrs.

<sup>6</sup> C. Hulsman, 'Seventh century documents about the arrival of Islam in Egypt', *Arab-West Report*, Week 8, Art 2, 19th March 2009: [www.arabwestreport.info/year-2009/week-8/2-seventh-century-documents-about-arrival-islam-egypt](http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2009/week-8/2-seventh-century-documents-about-arrival-islam-egypt)

exchange for taxes and an acceptance of the new world order, while leaving the bureaucratic structure in place.

Since Christians knew nothing of the religion of their conquerors, it is possible they initially believed that it was related to Arianism since the early Muslims professed that Jesus was human and not divine. On the other hand, Muslims must have been bewildered by the debates between Christians about the nature of Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup>

The debates between Christians and Muslims were naturally influenced by the Qur'an. Muslim-Christian relations scholar Dr Hugh Goddard writes that the Qur'an is ambivalent with regard to Jesus, Christians and the Bible. These questions centred on who Jesus actually was, whether Son of God or a prophet. Over the years this has resulted in much discussion and speculation, but Muslims, throughout centuries of Qur'anic interpretation, deny mainstream Christian ideas, particularly the resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup>

Religion came to define communal relations. Benjamin's successor was faced with the poll tax or *jizyah* for non-Muslims, and during the rule of the third Patriarch, John III, (AD 677-686), the first documented friction appears between the Muslim ruler and the Coptic Orthodox Church's Patriarch.<sup>9</sup> By then, it was obvious to Christians that Islam was not only fundamentally different from Christianity, but a new system was instituted that transferred revenue from the Christian community to the Muslim elite.

### Becoming a Suffering Church, 8th-10th Century

From the eighth century onwards the church suffered from excessive state-led taxation in addition to internal divisions.

Much of our knowledge of this period comes from the *History of the Patriarchs*, a compilation of works from different authors over numerous centuries. An eighth-century author set Coptic suffering within a firm theological framework which would remain in place for centuries to come. The framework stated that any oppressor would receive divine retribution while the shepherds of the church – described as living martyrs – should bear the trials with patience, courage and unceasing prayer.

In AD 725, the first Coptic tax revolt erupted in response to the tax raised by Caliph Hishām's (AD 724-743) chief tax officer, only to be stopped through the use of force and instigating the settling of Arab tribes in the eastern margins of the Nile Delta. These factors began a process of rapid demographic change in Egypt.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Hulsman, 'Seventh century documents about the arrival of Islam in Egypt'.

<sup>8</sup> H. Goddard, *Muslim Perceptions of Christianity* (London: Grey Seal Books, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Hulsman, 'Seventh century documents about the arrival of Islam in Egypt'.

<sup>10</sup> Swanson, *The Coptic Papacy in Islamic Egypt, 641-1517*, 15-26.

The exemption of converts to Islam from paying the *jizyah* in AD 744-745 persuaded 24,000 Christians to renounce their faith. Regulations were made as rulers deemed them fit, but financial incentives always played an important role. More revolts followed in the eighth and ninth centuries, to be crushed each time and lead to the sacking of entire villages, churches and monasteries. An attempt of the Patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria to negotiate a settlement to a revolt in AD 830 failed, and in response the Caliph's army launched an attack to crush the revolt leading to great losses on both sides.<sup>11</sup>

The eighth and ninth centuries were the formative period of Islamic *fiqh* and *shari'a*. Muslim scholars argued for the use of *hadiths* (acts and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, often dated to the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries) and a traditionalist, literal interpretation of the Qur'an and *hadiths*. Islamic theology became more complex and the interpretation of Islamic law shifted from the task of the ruler to that of the scholars (*ulamā*) who could not as easily reinterpret Islamic law and depended on support from both the ruler and the community.

Texts were developed in the political context of the time. Dutch scholar Hans Jansen illustrated this with the biography of the Prophet Muhammad written by Ibn Hishām which is more geared towards Abbasidian political and religious interests than describing historical truth. The stories by Ibn Hishām were used in doctrinal fights with Christians and Jews, material that motivated soldiers in those days.<sup>12</sup> On this, Jansen asks for a distinction between historical facts and legend. Later, many Muslims have either taken this text as a rough guide for behaviour towards non-Muslims or, as Tarīq Ramadān did, simply skip the stories that are no longer pleasant for modern usage.<sup>13</sup>

Christians became *dhimmīs*, protected people, if they paid taxes, *jizyah*, and accepted the Islamic order with all its restrictions for *dhimmīs*. The legal traditions reflected in the decrees of Caliph al-Mutawakkil (847-861) would around the ninth century crystallise in different versions of the 'Covenant of Umar' that regulated relations between Muslims and non-Muslims or *dhimmīs*. It was attributed to the 'rightly guided' Caliph 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattāb (634-644) because it would grant it greater authority but had, in fact, nothing to do with this Caliph.

The Covenant prohibited church building, the rebuilding of destroyed churches and displaying a cross on churches. Furthermore, it banned the display of Christian symbols in public including books, preaching to Muslims with intent to convert them, and enforced the idea that non-

<sup>11</sup> M. Megally, 'Bashmuric revolts', in A.S. Atiya (ed), *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2 (New York, Toronto, Oxford, Singapore, Sydney: Macmillan, 1991), 349-51.

<sup>12</sup> H. Jansen and B. Doyle, *Muhamad: The Mecca and Medina Stories* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Presentation from Arabist Eildert Mulder at Arab-West Report, Cairo, 17th June 2009.

Muslim places of worship had to be lower than the lowest mosque in town. Renovated churches were destroyed and non-Muslim civil servants were dismissed and consequently many converted to Islam<sup>14</sup>

Rulers saw the Covenant as a suitable political measure by the standards of their time.<sup>15</sup> It could well have been a response to the Coptic tax revolts in the preceding centuries.

The Covenant of Umar received later canonical status among many Muslim jurists. Ibn Taīmiyyah (1263-1328) accepted the authenticity of the pact and further ruled that *dhimmīs* could claim equal status with Muslims if they joined the state's army and fought alongside Muslims. However, the Covenant of Umar has not been systematically applied throughout the centuries, and rather was selectively applied whenever desired by Muslim rulers.<sup>16</sup> Its application also correlated with an increase in conversions to Islam in Egypt.

By the mid-ninth century, demographic studies show that Christianity in Egypt had declined drastically to around 20% of the population.<sup>17</sup> Conversions were motivated by various factors. Some of the peripheral tribes were simply absorbed into the Muslim majority;<sup>18</sup> many Christians converted to spare themselves hardships. These factors, in addition to Muslim migration from other corners of the empire, were key reasons for this demographic change.

The *History of the Patriarchs* also includes information relating to internal strife in the church, explaining this in religious terms as Satan creating trials for God's followers. Much of the internal strife related to friction over power and finance. The church faced continuous financial obligations, and in order to meet these needs, the practice of simony was introduced, whereby sums of money were collected from those who wished

<sup>14</sup> Swanson, *The Coptic Papacy in Islamic Egypt, 641-1517*, 34.

<sup>15</sup> Azhar scholar Dr Anas Aboshady, email 5th March, 2014:

[www.arabwestreport.info/year-2015/week-10/01-place-covenant-omar-muslim-christian-relations](http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2015/week-10/01-place-covenant-omar-muslim-christian-relations)

<sup>16</sup> Some claim that the Covenant of Omar is applied today by authorities in Egypt but this is not the case. Islamists, however, may refer to this as justification for their opposition to church building. See Cornelis Hulsman, 'Does the Shari'a prohibit building churches?' Arab-West Report, Week 44, Art. 39, 4th November 2011: [www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-44/39-does-sharia-prohibit-building-churches](http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-44/39-does-sharia-prohibit-building-churches). Azhar scholar Dr Anas Aboshady writes that the different versions of these covenants are not authentic since they lack a reliable *Isnad* (chain of narrators).

<sup>17</sup> Y. Courbage and P. Fargues, *Christians and Jews Under Islam* (London, New York: I.B. Taurisk, 1998), 22-28.

<sup>18</sup> Siwa, for example, has never been Christian. The Aryans, according to Imam Fādīl Sulayman, converted to Islam and Prof. Harald Suermann states that there were practically no more Aryans in Egypt by the seventh century.

to be ordained a bishop, priest or deacon. Others in the church strongly criticised this practice.<sup>19</sup>

### Improving Fortunes During the Fatimids and Ayyubids

The fortunes of Egypt's Christian population improved during most of the Fatimid's rule of Egypt (969-1171). Fatimid rulers were Isma'ili Shi'ites ruling a predominantly Sunni Muslim population, and thus they needed the support of other minorities. Fatimid Caliphs made outings to churches and monasteries, often bestowing grants of land to them, and new churches were built and old ones restored during this period. Coptic tradition owes this fortunate treatment to the miracle of the moving of the Moqattam Mountains outside Cairo.<sup>20</sup>

The tyrant Caliph Al-Hākim Bi-'Amr Āllah (985-1021) – whose mother remarkably was Christian – was an exception in the period of Fatimid rule. Christians were forbidden to ride horses, were forced to wear black and, in addition, churches were often burned and replaced by mosques. In the Druze faith, the Caliph became a central figure, but he is denounced among Sunni historians for his belief that he was a reincarnation of God. The Caliph's religious position remains disputed among scholars.

In a period of rapidly changing fortunes, Caliph Al-Hāfiz (1132-1146) appointed Bahrān, an Armenian Christian general as *wazīr*, i.e. as the Caliph's leading official. However, Bahrān's pro-Christian activities resulted in a popular revolt that toppled him. During the rule of his successor, churches were plundered, the *jizyah* raised and discriminatory measures against *dhimmi*s were enacted.<sup>21</sup>

Eventually, the Fatimid empire was overthrown by Salah Ed-din, marking the beginning of the Ayyubid period (1174-1260), under which Egypt enjoyed prosperity and the Coptic Orthodox Church experienced a renaissance wherein the scholars of the period had a profound effect on the teachings of the church. Despite this, a 19-year period was marred by internal divisions regarding the succession of the Pope.<sup>22</sup>

### Christians in Classical Islamic Thought

When Muslims first encountered Christians, they knew little about the Christian faith. This changed over time and resulted in an ambiguity, both positive and negative. Hugh Goddard identifies three predominant attitudes

<sup>19</sup> Swanson, *The Coptic Papacy in Islamic Egypt*, 35.

<sup>20</sup> Swanson, *The Coptic Papacy in Islamic Egypt*, 49-52. The story is not recorded outside Coptic sources and thus appears to be a creation to explain that the attitude changes of Muslim rulers were because of a miracle. For Coptic Christians the historicity of this event is not questioned.

<sup>21</sup> Swanson, *The Coptic Papacy in Islamic Egypt*, 68.

<sup>22</sup> Swanson, *The Coptic Papacy in Islamic Egypt*, 85-95.

held – either irenic, neutral or antagonistic – held by Muslims in regard to their Christian counterparts: among these various views the Sufi philosopher Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240) described Jesus as the 'seal of the saints', holding almost a parallel position to Muhammad as the 'seal of the prophets'. On the other hand, the influential Islamic theologian Al-Ghāzālī (d. 1111), although not anti-Christian, argued that Christianity is fundamentally irrational, a position many Muslim scholars hold even today. Lastly, the antagonistic attitude is embodied in the work of Ibn Taīmīyyah (d. 1328), a source of inspiration for many contemporary Islamists. He made divisive attacks on Christians whom he saw as an internal threat to Islamic society since Christians still formed a large minority in Muslim lands and furthermore represented an external threat because of the Crusades. Although Ibn Taīmīyyah did not question the reliability of the Bible, he believed Christians had misinterpreted it. Goddard argues that different writers were to a large extent influenced by the context of those days.<sup>23</sup> These attitudes remain widely identifiable in the context of Muslim-Christian relations today.

### **Mamluks and Ottomans, 1250-1798**

During the Mamluk period (1250-1517), Christians were marginalised again. Internal rivalry, weak Patriarchs and external interference further weakened the Christian community. Internal security increased upon the arrival of the Ottomans, but Mamluk elitism remained as rulers.

By the time Napoleon conquered Egypt, 1798-1801, Christians and Jews, according to French researchers, made up around 8.6% of the Egyptian population. There were hardly any Christians left in the Delta, which had become almost entirely Muslim. Christianity was concentrated in Upper Egypt where large isolated areas were entirely Christian. Christians who held higher positions in society tended to reside in Cairo.

### **19th and 20th-Century Improvements**

The position of Christians improved tremendously in the 19th century during the rule of Muhammad 'Alī (1806-1849), who introduced many economic and educational reforms, including allowing Catholic and Protestant foreign missions to establish schools. The *jizyah* was abolished in 1856 and Christians joined the army. From that point onward, Christians and Muslims were taxed equally. Many Christians began to migrate from Upper Egypt to Cairo and the Delta because of the better economic opportunities.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Upper Egypt, isolated for centuries, opened up. Canals, roads and railways improved communication between

---

<sup>23</sup> Goddard, *Muslim Perceptions of Christianity*.

Upper Egypt and Cairo where the better opportunities lay. Muhammad 'Alī and his successors distributed large sections of land to trusted elites, both Muslim and Christian. These large landowners became important political figures in local politics and national politics.

Egypt became a British Protectorate in 1882. Sa'ad Zaghlūl, founder of the Wafd Party, led the independence movement in the 1920s. He succeeded in uniting Muslims and Christians after a brief period of tension when a Coptic Prime Minister was murdered in 1910 and Copts demanded more rights at a conference in Asyut in 1911. British *de facto* occupation continued until 1956. Sa'ad Zaghlūl's efforts had a great effect during the liberal period when Copts played a larger political role from the 1923 Constitution until the 1952 Revolution. The Copt William Makram Ebeid became general secretary of the ruling Wafd Party and thus became the most powerful Copt in this period. Educated Copts in Egypt have a tendency to look at this period as the golden age for Christians in modern Egyptian history.

With the creation of the Muslim Brotherhood by Hassan Al-Bannā in 1928, antagonism against liberals, a group widely supported by Copts, began to gain popular currency. This antagonism coincided, but is not connected, with increased Coptic migration from Upper Egypt to the urban centres of Cairo and Alexandria which saw the demographics shift from 80% of all Copts estimated to reside in Upper Egypt in 1925, decreasing to 50% in 2003.<sup>24</sup>

### Presidents with Military Backgrounds, 1952-2011

The Young Officers ousted King Farouq in 1952, after which Gamal 'Abdel Nasser came to power. He has close relations with the Muslim Brotherhood after they had fought beside the Egyptian Army in Palestine. In addition, the Brotherhood agreed to assist the Revolution, mostly by maintaining order, protecting foreigners and minorities, and encouraging popular support for the army.<sup>25</sup>

Under the auspices of Arab nationalism and socialist principles, Nasser broke the power base of the traditional Egyptian elite. Aristocratic lands owned by wealthy Muslim and Coptic families was nationalised and redistributed, and education provided to all Egyptians, regardless of class. However, in order to remain in power, Nasser created a police state and treated any opponents, including the Muslim Brotherhood, with fierce repression.

<sup>24</sup> Estimate made with Prof. N. S. Hopkins when we worked on the book *Upper Egypt: Life along the Nile* (Denmark: Moesgard Museum, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> R.P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 144-51.



Nasser's nationalisation policies also led to the first wave of Coptic migration from Egypt to the United States and Europe.

The youth-led grassroots movement, known as the Sunday School Movement, revived Coptic religious education and initiated a spiritual revival in the church.<sup>26</sup> Coptic activism also took on a militant form in the shape of the 'Ummah al-Qibṭiyyah (Coptic nation) who wanted Pope Yūsāb II, an indecisive leader, to resign, and so kidnapped him in 1954. Yūsāb II was reinstated by state security, but his strength was broken.

The interference of Nasser's state security had a drastic effect, when they cracked down on the Muslim Brotherhood in 1954. A member was accused of attempting to assassinate President Nasser and overthrow the government; however, this remains disputed between Islamists and their opponents. Hassan Al-Hudāybi (1891-1973), the second General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood (in office 1949-1972), had dissolved the Brotherhood's secret militant apparatus before the crackdown in 1954. Mass arrests and torture of Muslim Brothers triggered a shift towards militancy despite Al-Hudāybi's efforts to counteract Brotherhood militancy. It was within this context that the ideologue Sayyīd Qutb (1906-1966) developed the concept of *jāhilliyyah* and *jihād*, the ignorance of divine guidance and armed struggle, preceded by an ideological maturation of the individual. Sayyīd was hanged by the state in 1966.

Qutb's ideology was further developed into the concept of *takfīr*, making it possible to declare Muslim leaders and others *kāfir* (non-believers), thus providing an ideological justification to kill others, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. President Anwar Al-Sadat was murdered in 1981 under this pretext.

Different schools radicalised members of the Muslim Brotherhood, wherein one group follows Sayyīd Qutb's line of thinking and heavy-handed experiences, including torture. Many escaped abroad and later influenced people such as Osama bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zāwāhirī, who since the 1980s were instrumental in forming new groups in Egypt such as al-Jamā'a al-Islāmiyyah and Takfīr w-al-Hijrah.

When President Nasser died in 1970, he was succeeded by his Vice-President, Anwar Al-Sadat (1970-1981), who dismantled the secular/leftist powerbase of his predecessor, thus giving more scope to Islamists who had up until that time been persecuted. In this new political environment, the Brothers were tolerated and encouraged, but never obtained legal status.

Islamists differ from one another mainly in terms of their level of determination and their methods of defending their principles. However, all Islamists believe that Egypt should be ruled with Islamic principles, first and foremost through the application of the *sharī'ah*. This, they believe,

---

<sup>26</sup> W. Reiss: *Erneuerung in der Koptisch-Orthodoxe Kirche* (Hamburg: LIT Verlag, 1996).



will bring justice in contrast to the widespread injustice that was thought to be the consequence of military rule.

In 1971, Pope Shenouda II (who had his roots in the Sunday School Movement) was elected Patriarch. He was more activist and assertive than his predecessors and was believed to be defending Christian interests and leading the opposition against the application of the *sharī'ah* on a national level. This resulted in frequent clashes with the President and an increased number of incidents in which not only Christians, but also Muslims, were killed.

Increased religious fervour resulted in greater Muslim and Christian missionary fervour. The number of Christians converting to Islam grew rapidly, particularly from Sadat's time to the present, creating a sense of fear among Christians. Fears that Muslims might attempt to convert their children to Islam has stimulated a withdrawal back into their own community. Claims of forced conversions are difficult to prove, but they fit within the culture of avoiding the shame of conversion through blaming others.<sup>27</sup>

Only a small number of Muslims have converted to Christianity but their arrests have often resulted in high-profile attention by western Christian rights organisations which, with reasonable success, have launched stories in the western media. In turn, this has increased the enthusiasm among some Muslim groups to spread message of Islam.

Political clashes in the 1970s in which both Muslim Brothers and Christian leaders were involved coincided with a growing contention over the estimates given of the percentage of Coptic Christians in the population. Coptic Christians, often supported by Muslim liberals, provide estimates ranging between 10% and 20%. Demographer Philippe Fargues, however, believes the percentage to be closer to 6%, which would make the percentage of Christian youth converting to Islam by comparison with the natural growth of the Christian community substantially higher.<sup>28</sup>

When, in reaction to clashes between Christians and Muslims in 1981, Sadat arrested over 1,500 people, including Islamists, political activists and intellectuals of all colours, as well as over one hundred Christians (clergy and non-clergy), Pope Shenouda was sent into exile in the Monastery of Bīshūy. Not long after, Sadat and Bishop Samuel, then head of the Committee of Bishops (replacing Pope Shenouda), were killed by Muslim militants during a military parade on 6th October 1981. Sadat's successor

<sup>27</sup> Hulsman, 'Christians victims of the growing Islamist non-Islamist divide; the urgent need for peace and reconciliation', *Arab-West Papers* No. 48, (11th September 2013): [www.arabwestreport.info/christians-victims-growing-islamist-non-islamist-divide-urgent-need-peace-and-reconciliation](http://www.arabwestreport.info/christians-victims-growing-islamist-non-islamist-divide-urgent-need-peace-and-reconciliation)

<sup>28</sup> Hulsman, 'Discrepancies Between Coptic Statistics in the Egyptian Census and Estimates Provided by the Coptic Orthodox Church', *Arab-West Papers*, No. 52 (June 2014): [www.arabwestreport.info/discrepancies-between-coptic-statistics-egyptian-census-and-estimates-provided-coptic-orthodox](http://www.arabwestreport.info/discrepancies-between-coptic-statistics-egyptian-census-and-estimates-provided-coptic-orthodox)

Mubarak gradually released leaders imprisoned by Sadat, and in January 1984 Pope Shenouda returned from exile. By then his relationship with the government had changed and he was less confrontational, and placed more emphasis on trying to find solutions in concert with Egyptian officials. Pope Shenouda also sought contact with the Muslim Brotherhood leader 'Umar Al-Tilmisānī.

Islamist influence increased among students in the 1970s as well. When Mubarak allowed parliamentary elections in 1984 (the first since 1952), the Muslim Brotherhood participated and their strength grew. But each time the ambitions of the Brotherhood ran high, they were crushed.<sup>29</sup>

Muslim Brothers advocated non-violent approaches, but some of their younger and more impatient members joined the militant al-Jamā'a al-Islāmiyyah and Jihadist movements, and attacked the police, Christians (in particular jewellers because they needed money) and sometimes tourists with the purpose of harming Egypt's tourism industry – all in the hope of pressurising the Egyptian government. When in November 1997, 58 tourists were killed by extremists in Luxor, it caused a sharp slump in tourism and cost Egypt billions of dollars in income, instigating an effective government crackdown on Islamic militancy.

Peace returned to the country but government efforts to provide jobs for the poor failed. Mosques, churches and religious organisations had built thousands of hospitals and clinics autonomously throughout the country to address the needs of the poor. Some of these activities were organised by the Muslim Brotherhood, improving their public image and strengthening their public support.

Since the 1970s, internal migration has increased. Many areas in Upper Egypt have seen an increase in their Muslim population due to Christian migration to Cairo and other cities, conversion to Islam and smaller average family sizes for Christians. Additionally, many higher-educated Christians emigrated to different western countries.

The Egyptian government was walking a tightrope. The Palestinian *Intifādah*, the harsh Israeli responses (2000-2005) and the US-led invasion of Iraq (2003) had strengthened Islamist and anti-western sentiments. In 2005 elections brought 88 Muslim Brotherhood 'independents' into parliament. These elections were more closely monitored by human rights organisations than any previous elections but were not completely free of electoral violence and manipulation. More than 800 Muslim Brotherhood members were arrested for fighting with National Democratic Party (NDP) supporters who attempted to bar Muslim Brotherhood supporters from going to polling stations. Muslim Brotherhood believe that rigging and intimidation cost them several seats.

---

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Dr Hoda Awad, Professor of Political Science, American University of Cairo, 20th July 2013.

The 2010 parliamentary elections, described by Egyptian human rights organisations as the most fraudulent in Egypt's history, resulted in an overwhelming victory for the NDP and an expanding distrust in Egyptian elections. This became one of the catalysts for the January 25th Revolution in 2011.

Copts expected nothing good from a revolution in which Islamists, with whom they had clashed on several occasions, were expected to be the winning party. There had been frequent and recurring tensions between Muslims and Christians, mostly triggered over forced conversions and restrictions on church building, and at times social problems in combination with a mostly absent government. Tensions were exacerbated through biased media and inflammatory false allegations, such as the churches hiding weapons and preparing for a 'war against the Muslims'.<sup>30</sup>

The period up until the Revolution was mostly characterised by Muslim Brothers' continuous attempts to increase their political role, while the government promoted fear of the Brotherhood. Muslim Brotherhood leaders repeatedly rejected the use of violence but the line between the Brotherhood, their members and militant groups has become blurred.

The division between irenic, neutral and antagonistic Muslim attitudes towards Christians has remained. These are obviously circumstances that can push Muslims to turn into more irenic or more antagonistic interpretations of Islamic scriptures towards Christians.

### **Christians in Egypt on the Fourth Anniversary of the January 25th Egyptian Revolution** **Ramez Atallah**

Even though many Copts experience life as 'second-class' citizens, they are both '*a discriminated minority*' and a '*thriving community*'. Many Christian entrepreneurs thrived in the post-Sadat Neo-Liberal economy since the early seventies. It is now estimated that these entrepreneurs control a significant portion of Egypt's wealth. Also, in spite of limitations, many churches are increasing their activities and expanding their facilities.

Like Christians everywhere in the world, those who name the name of Jesus are often ridiculed or scorned. Though Muslims respect Jesus as a prophet, tensions have always existed between the Christian community and some of their Muslim neighbours. Such tensions are often linked to issues like building churches and conversions, and spill over into ugly violence, especially in popular areas in large cities or rural areas where the rule of law is weak.

---

<sup>30</sup> Hulsman, 'AWR Editorial: Intolerant Climate in Egypt and Media Manipulations Result in Row around Bishop Bīshūy', *Arab-West Report*, Week 43, Art. 32, 25th October 2010: [www.arabwestreport.info/year-2010/week-43/32-awr-editorial-intolerant-climate-egypt-and-media-manipulations-result-row](http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2010/week-43/32-awr-editorial-intolerant-climate-egypt-and-media-manipulations-result-row)

### *A Period of Remarkably Unpredictable Change*

Since the incredible events which took place during the 18-day popular Revolution in early 2011, Egypt has been in a state of flux. Four short years later we are on our *third* Constitution, *third* president and expecting the election of our *third* parliament.

The most remarkable development during these four years, however, has been the wholesale rejection of political Islam. Political analysts have referred to this as a modern-day miracle – no one had expected it.

With the political pendulum swinging from one extreme to the other several times, where are Christians and the church today? Let me give my personal perspective on the church's response to this rapid change and the challenges ahead.

### *Political Sensitisation*

Before 25th January 2011 only a few Christians were knowledgeable about politics. Few Christians voted, many were not interested in politics, and they had very little nationalistic fervour. Several years could go by without a pastor making reference to the Christian's social responsibility except as it related to social needs in the church. The same was true also of the average Egyptian Muslim.

However, 25th January and what followed changed all this. The main topic of conversation among Egyptians since has been politics. Newspapers and TV stations now have a large readership and audience from all walks of life. In the past, the best-known TV personalities used to be well-known actors. Now they are well-known political writers or anchor men/women who host political/social talk shows several times per week.

Before 25th January, newspapers and TV shows rarely involved women and/or Christians. Now TV talk shows dealing with many different topics often include women and Christians as guests. The church has become an integral part of Egyptian society in a way we could never have dreamed of!

### *The Church at the Cutting Edge*

Churches near places where violence took place between demonstrators and police opened their facilities as field clinics to serve the wounded. Qasr al-Dūbārah Presbyterian Church, located right off Tahrir Square, was a pioneer of this in Egypt and got the attention and admiration of the whole nation. Many pastors now encourage their members to be involved in the political process. The Bible Society of Egypt had a two-year long campaign entitled 'Rebuild Egypt'. Banners, adverts in newspapers, Scripture selections – all pointed to the Bible as a source of principles upholding the lofty aspirations of the Revolution: freedom, social justice and human dignity.

Christians in a variety of social agencies and ministries have been able to make their services known through the much greater exposure now available to them and thus impact a much broader section of society. Some groups have been successful in hosting friendly yet frank interfaith dialogue between leaders of the two religions.

### *Future Challenges*

While in the early days Egyptian revolutionaries really believed that a new era of complete openness and democracy was being ushered in, they soon realised that this new-found freedom was exploited. Once the Islamists rose to power, there was no way to remove them except by popular demand. This is what happened on 30th June 2013 when Egyptians went to the streets in unprecedented numbers (in the millions), asking for Morsi to step down.

Morsi rejected the demands and the call to hold new elections. Because Egypt had no impeachment procedure in place, there was no way to remove him except through military intervention. The vast majority of Egyptian Muslims and Christians supported the removal of Islamists from power and elected Sisi. However, some are concerned about the long-term implications of increased government control.

Egypt needs prayer so that its political leaders will find a way to keep the Islamists at bay without completely abrogating human rights. Christian leaders need prayer so that they hold firmly to Biblical principles and not sell out to political pragmatism.

# CHRISTIANS IN TURKEY AS PART OF A WESTERN CONSPIRACY? A TURKISH PERSPECTIVE ON CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES

Wolfgang Häde

In December 2001, the Turkish newspaper *Sabah*<sup>1</sup> quoted a report which had been prepared for the National Security Council (*Millî Güvenlik Kurulu*), ‘at the time widely considered the most powerful institution in Turkey’.<sup>2</sup> This report listed Christian missionaries as one of the great dangers to the country of Turkey, and subsequently triggered a media campaign against Christians involved in missionary activities.<sup>3</sup> It is a common element of the public discourse in Turkey to perceive missionaries as part of a western conspiracy and therefore as a great danger for the unity and integrity of the country.

The danger to Turkey allegedly comes from Christian missionaries. The very small Protestant minority is the community that is most active in spreading its faith. Therefore, very often public accusations in Turkey are directed against Protestants. However, the perception of Christians as being an instrument of hostile powers is not limited to Protestant missionaries but often indicates a general distrust against Christians in the country.

## Some Examples

*Yeniçağ*, another Turkish daily newspaper, quotes the deputy General Secretary of the right wing ‘Party of the Nationalistic Movement’ (MHP: *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*), Mehmet Şandır, ‘saying that missionary activities never have been the communication of a faith’, but ‘a political activity and a tool in the hands of global powers that have cast an eye on Turkey’.<sup>4</sup> There is a wide array of publications presenting ‘research’ about

Copyrighted Material

<sup>1</sup> Mehmet Çetingüleç, ‘Misyoner alarmı’ [‘missionary alarm’], *Sabah*, 7th December 2001: <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2001/12/07/p06.html>

<sup>2</sup> ESI (European Stability Initiative), *Murder in Anatolia. Christian Missionaries and Turkish Ultrationalism* (Berlin: [www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi\\_document\\_id\\_124.pdf](http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_document_id_124.pdf) (accessed 28.10.2014) 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Cf Wolfgang Häde, ‘Perceptions of Christians in Turkey? – A Study of the Climate of Accusations against Christians in Turkish Newspapers’, in *International Journal for Religious Freedom*, Vol. 6, 1-2/2013 (2013), 67-69.

<sup>4</sup> ‘misyonerlik faaliyetlerinin hiçbir zaman bin inancın tebliği olmadığını söyledi. Hristiyan misyonerliğinin bir siyasi faaliyet olduğunu ve Türkiye üzerinde gözü

missionaries. Their quality is very diverse, sometimes doubtful. The book about 'Missionary activities from the Ottoman times until today', authored by Necdet Sevinç that saw seven editions until 2009, gives a good example of such an analysis:

No state will accept as an expression of democracy the activities as fifth column of an enemy who works to win its citizens for a different religion or for a different national awareness. No state will close its eyes to the fact that its citizens are caught by some priests.<sup>5</sup>

In 490 pages the book offers a lot of material, especially about the Ottoman past. The result of the research becomes obvious through the headings chosen for some of the chapters: '*Pawn of political chess*',<sup>6</sup> '*Assault of priests from beyond the Atlantic Ocean*', '*The last shelter of the enemy*'.<sup>8</sup>

Such assertions about Christians and their activities are stronger and more accentuated in the nationalistic and the Islamic segments of Turkish society. However, to perceive missionary work as part of western imperialism is a very acceptable thought among very diverse social groups.<sup>9</sup> So Şinasi Gündüz, a much-respected Turkish Islamic theologian, writes very similar things in his study about 'Missionary activities':<sup>10</sup>

... missionary activities are practiced not alone as a movement being active towards religious goals, but at the same time as an effort to widen the political and military fields of dominion of diverse power centers... Today... as the Muslims are perhaps in the weakest position of history, Christian missions have accelerated their work towards Muslim countries with fervor, so to speak to take revenge for the defeat in history.<sup>11</sup>

---

olan küresel güçlerin elinde bir maşa olarak kullanıldığına [dikkat çeken Şandır... 'Article 'Bu topraklar Hristiyan toprağı olamayacak' ['This soil will not be Christian soil'], *Yeniçağ*, 19th January 2005, 11.

<sup>5</sup> Hiçbir devlet, kendi vatandaşlarına başka bir din veya başka bir milliyet şuuru kazandırmak için çalışan düşman 5. Kolu'nun faaliyetlerini bir demokrasi göstergesi olarak kabul etmemiştir. Hiçbir devlet, vatandaşlarının bazı papazlar tarafından ele geçirilmesine göz yummamıştır.' *Necdet Sevinç, Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Misyoner Faaliyetler* [Missionary Activities from the Ottoman Times until Today], (İstanbul: Bilge Oğuz, 2009 [2000]), 9.

<sup>6</sup> Sevinç, *Osmanlı'dan*, 39.

<sup>7</sup> Sevinç, *Osmanlı'dan*, 93.

<sup>8</sup> Sevinç, *Osmanlı'dan*, 203.

<sup>9</sup> Cf Haede, 'Perceptions', 82.

<sup>10</sup> Şinasi Gündüz, *Misyonerlik* [Missionsarbeit], (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2009 [2006]).

<sup>11</sup> Gündüz, *Misyonerlik*, 124: '... misyonerlik, yalnızca dinsel amaca yönelik faaliyette bulunan bir hareket olarak kalmamakta, aynı zamanda çeşitli güç odaklarının siyasal ve askerî egemenlik alanlarını genişletmeye yönelik çabalar olarak sürdürülmektedir... Günümüzde..., Müslümanların belki de tarihte en güçsüz oldukları bir konumda, Hristiyan misyonerliği âdetâ tarihteki yenilginin bir rövanşını alma gayretiyle İslâm ülkelerine yönelik çalışmalarına hız vermiştir.'

The so-called ‘power centers’ are identified by Gündüz as western powers, especially the USA and Great Britain.<sup>12</sup> Believers from the ancient Christian minorities in Turkey have been confronted with doubts like this for centuries. These allegations, however, are especially hurtful for ethnic Turks from a Muslim background who turned to Christianity, who are mostly part of the small Turkish Protestant community and who are considered traitors of their home country.<sup>13</sup>

### Reasons Claimed for this Perception

Historical references are prevalent among the reasons for the assumption that Christians are servants of a western conspiracy aimed at weakening Turkey. The missionary movement in the Ottoman Empire of the 19th century is the main focus of the allegedly close relationship between Christian missionaries and western colonialism. In particular, Sevinç perceives the educational institutions founded and run by missionaries at that time as hatcheries for rebellion against Turkish dominion.<sup>14</sup>

The Crusades of the Middle Ages (1095-1291) are also often mentioned to prove the ‘real’ intentions of Christian missions. Missionary activities are seen as a continuation of the Crusades with other means, as ‘Crusades without weapons.’<sup>15</sup> Very recent events of history like the American occupation of Iraq (2003), and especially the evangelical and mission-friendly identity of the then US President George W. Bush<sup>16</sup> are among the other issues serving to demonstrate the bad intentions of missionaries.

### Historical Background of the Perception

Because Turkish authors refer to historical factors so often, it is useful to have a closer look at the historical background of their perceptions.<sup>17</sup> As

<sup>12</sup> Gündüz, *Misyonerlik*, 89: ‘başta ABD ve İngiltere olmak üzere Batılı güçleri[n].’

<sup>13</sup> Cf for the true story of a Turkish convert Wolfgang Haede. Necati Aydın, *a Turkish Martyr for Christ*. (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice), especially 21-22.

<sup>14</sup> Sevinç, *Osmanlı’dan*. As one of many examples in his book cf 172: ‘Türk Girer Fakat Türk Çıkamaz’ [‘Man geht als Türkei hinein kann aber nicht als Türke herausgehen’].

<sup>15</sup> So the headline of an article in the Turkish daily newspaper *Yeniçağ* on 5th January 2005 (‘‘Sılahsız’’ Haçlı Seferleri’).

<sup>16</sup> Gündüz explicitly writes about ‘the dimension of global evangelism in Christian missions’ (Gündüz, *Misyonerlik*., 89: ‘Hristiyan misyonerliğinin küresel evanjelizm boyutu[nda]’). ‘Evangelism’ is often wrongly used for ‘evangelicalism’ in Turkish literature.

<sup>17</sup> For a more detailed paper on this background, cf Wolfgang Haede, ‘The historical background of the highly critical perception of Christians by the Turkish society’, *Mission Studies* 31 (2014), 191-205.



Turkey has a Muslim population of more than 99%,<sup>18</sup> the influence of the perception of Christians in the Qur'an and early Islam must not be neglected. In the Qur'an, Christians are characterised as the group being closest to Muslim believers (Sura 5:82). However, the fact that most Christians rejected the claim of Muhammad to be God's Prophet was a reason for the Holy Book of Islam to call Christians liars (Sura 3:71; 4:50) and deceivers (3:69). If, in addition, Christians try to keep people away from Islam (cf. Sura 4:167; 22:25), they are strongly criticised and deemed dangerous for the true faith of Islam. In early Islam, like later in the Ottoman Empire, Christians were tolerated as part of society if they accepted the status of being *dhimmīs*, people under the protection of the Muslim majority. The Christian *millet*, ethno-religious communities, had some kind of legal autonomy. However, they were considered second-class citizens with limited rights. The conversion of Muslims to the Christian faith was strictly prohibited.<sup>19</sup>

The Crusades (1095 – 1291) were in fact 'an almost irreparable disaster for the Christian cause'.<sup>20</sup> They are probably until today one of the main factors for the perception of Christians as western aggressors, though in fact the Orthodox Christians of the Middle East were often the victims of the Crusaders too. The fact that the Seljuqs as a Turkish people were the reason for the Crusades,<sup>21</sup> and the main enemy for the Christian armies, is of additional relevance for the collective consciousness of today's Turkey.

The decline of the Ottoman Empire that became inevitable after the Russian-Ottoman War (1768-74), and the confrontation with nationalistic ideas emanating from the French Revolution (1789), led to an identity crisis in the multinational and multi-religious realm. Some of the nations rebelling against Ottoman dominion and finally gaining independence after bloody fights were Christian (e.g. Greece 1829, Serbia 1878, and Bulgaria 1908). Christian foreign powers supported their revolts. Rising colonial powers like Russia, Great Britain and France interfered more and more in Ottoman internal politics and claimed the right to protect certain groups of Ottoman Christians.<sup>22</sup> So the interference of Christian powers is a well-known pattern in Turkish history.

<sup>18</sup> It should be kept in mind, however, that the population is not as homogeneous as this number might suggest. Approximately 10-15% of the population belong to the *Alevites*, a religious group that is very different from mainstream Sunni Islam.

<sup>19</sup> Cf Davide Zaffi, 'Das millet-System im Osmanischen Reich', in Christof Pan. (ed), *Die Entstehung des modernen Minderheitenschutzes in Europa* (Wien: Springer, 2006), 135.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (London: Penguin, 1990 [1964]), 97.

<sup>21</sup> Hans Eberhard Mayer, *Geschichte der Kreuzzüge* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2005 [1965]), 18.

<sup>22</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey – a Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris), [1993] 2007, 53-56.

Simultaneously, the 19th century saw the emergence of a vital Protestant missionary movement. The mission agency being most active in Anatolia was the 'American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions' (ABCFM). ABCFM had been inspired by the Second Great Awakening in the USA. The agency sent its first missionary to Istanbul (Constantinople) in 1831 and started a remarkable ministry in evangelism amongst the Christian minorities, but also in health services and education. It is certainly one-sided and superficial to perceive missionaries from western countries as agents and willing helpers of colonialism. But the era of colonial goals coincided with the time of missionary zeal and left many Turkish spectators, right up to the present time, with the impression that mission and colonialism were just two sides of the same coin.

Foreign influence, in combination with Ottoman legal and economic reforms, led to growing wealth and a better education of the remaining Christian minorities. The envy of the Muslim majority and rising tensions between Christians and Muslims resulted in the first massacres against the Armenian minority in 1895-96. Even before that, during the secessions of Christian people during the 19th century, hundreds of thousands of Muslims had left the new Christian countries and settled in Anatolia. When the Young Turks, a group of western-oriented officers, seized power in 1908, there was great hope for a more democratic society with equal rights for people of any faith. However, after the Empire lost the Balkan Wars of 1912-13, new streams of Muslims from the lost territories in Europe changed the structure of the Anatolian population radically. The Young Turk leadership had given up any hope of getting on good terms with the colonial 'Christian' powers.

The confusion of the World War (1914-18) provided an opportunity for the Young Turks to 'solve the Armenian question'. The genocide of 1915 was probably a cruel attempt to avoid further western interference on behalf of a Christian people in Turkey and secure 'Anatolia, the last refuge for the Turks'.<sup>23</sup> Hundreds of thousands of Armenians and Arameans lost their lives during deportations and mass killings. After the Ottoman Empire had lost the World War, the government of the Ottoman Sultan was forced by the western powers to sign the 'Peace of Sèvres' (1920) which reduced the Empire to small portions of Anatolia. Mustafa Kemal, later called 'Atatürk', a high ranking Ottoman military of the World War, organised the resistance against 'Sèvres'. The Turkish War of Independence (1919-23) against the invading 'Christian' country of Greece and its supporters resulted in the foundation of the Republic of Turkey on 29th October 1923.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk tried to turn Turkey towards western civilisation in order to modernise the country. His secular revolution limited the

<sup>23</sup> Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (Turkish original, 2001: İnsan Hakları ve Ermeni Sorunu: İttihat ve Terakki'den Kurtuluş Savaşına, translated by Paul Bessemer), (New York: Henry Holt, 2006), 126.

Islamic influence on the state. Instead, the state applied a strict control over the religious life of the country. The new secular society was not really pluralistic. Turkey was to be built on a Turkish *and* Islamic identity. Kemalism, the new state ideology, tried to Turkify ethnic Muslim groups other than the Turks. Christian minorities gained equal constitutional rights, but the stigmatising of Christians as outsiders was stricter than ever.<sup>24</sup> Freedom of Christian mission was severely limited. Turkey tried to learn from the West in order to resist the West.

Looking at history, we see numerous reasons to perceive Christians as a threat for Turkey. Christians resisting the claims of the Prophet Muhammad were seen as enemies early in Islamic history. The Crusades were a western 'Christian' attempt to push back the Turkish Seljuqs. In retrospect, western colonial ambitions combined with intensive missionary activities are still seen as responsible for the decline and the final disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had to save the rest of Anatolia by fighting against 'Christians' and tried to secure the new Republic by an intentional Turkification.

Turkey is a fertile soil for all kinds of conspiracy theories. Turkologist Christoph Herzog declares:

... There can be no doubt that conspiracy theories claim an important place in Turkish mainstream media and that they [the theories] are not exclusively the domain of any extreme political camp.<sup>25</sup>

A study of conspiracy theories in Turkey names 'ontological insecurity' in Turkey as one of the main reasons for the receptivity for such thoughts. '... One of the most important ontological insecurities in Turkish politics', however, is the 'Sèvres syndrome',<sup>26</sup> the trauma of the almost successful attempt to completely disintegrate the Ottoman Empire through the above-mentioned 'Peace of Sèvres'. The effective historical trauma, however, is, as we realised, not limited to the Sèvres experience, but consists of a mix of historical guilt of western powers against the Ottoman Empire, and also of Turkish guilt, such as the elimination of so many Armenians and Arameans that has never effectively been dealt with.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Cf Ayhan Aktar, *Varlık Vergisi ve Türkleştirme Politikaları* [The capital levy and the politics of Turkification], 11th ed. (Istanbul: İletişim, 2012 [2000]), 101-102.

<sup>25</sup> Christof Herzog, 'Small and Large Scale Conspiracy Theories and Their Problems: An Example from Turkey', in Maurus Reinkowski and Michael Butter (eds); *Conspiracy Theories in the United States and the Middle East. A Comparative Approach* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 195: '... Es kann kein Zweifel daran bestehen, dass Verschwörungstheorien einen wichtigen Platz in den türkischen Mainstream-Medien einnehmen und dass sie nicht die ausschließliche Domäne irgendeines extremistischen Lagers sind.'

<sup>26</sup> Türkay Salim Nefes, 'Political Parties' Perceptions and Uses of Anti-Semitic Conspiracy Theories in Turkey', *The Sociological Review*, Vol 61/2 (2013), 151-52.

<sup>27</sup> The Turkish columnist Cengiz Çandar on 24th April 2014, the 99th anniversary of the Armenian genocide, addresses the Turkish society in the Turkish newspaper

Of course, the fact that conspiracy theories are common in a society must not be an easy excuse for avoiding serious research about the credibility of any given theory. But it may help to know that there is a deep distrust against foreign political powers and against religious minorities that makes it very likely for people in Turkey to be receptive to the idea of Christians as being a part of a conspiracy against Turkey.

### How Christians Should React

What can be a proper Christian response to the mistrust by society in general and the alleged link with bad western intentions against Turkey in particular? Christians confronted with accusations are probably not able, in a short time, to change the society that perceives them with prejudice. But how they react is within the range of their own responsibility. Because the criticism is mostly directed against Protestant missionaries, the suggestions in this chapter focus on the Protestant Christian community in Turkey.

### Checking for Some Truth in the Assertions

It is not easy to check and either prove or disprove the accusation that Christians are part of a politically oriented conspiracy. Isn't it one of the characteristics of conspiracies that they are secret? Some of the criticism that is found in Turkish publications is too general to be checked, while other writings present such an abundance of allegedly historical details that it would not be realistic to expect the average Christian believer in Turkey to deal with these questions in detail.

However, quality missiological research in the context of today's Turkey will have to examine the question whether Christian missionaries of the past really have at times pursued a political agenda. Even if that has most probably not been the case for the majority of missionaries, mission studies have to ask how far Christian workers occasionally confused the supposedly Christian cultures of their countries of origin with the ethics of the Gospel, or if they sometimes relied on the political power of their countries for enhancing their missionary agenda. Interestingly, even a Turkish Islamic theologian in his recent doctoral thesis about Christian missiology showed appreciation for the self-critical function of this branch of Christian theology that exposes and corrects wrong attitudes and practices of Christian mission in the past.<sup>28</sup>

---

*Radikal*: "If we are looking for 'excuses' instead of recognizing what happened in 1915, we all will rot together" ['1915' te olanı tanımak yerine ona 'mazeret' ararsak, hep birlikte çürürüz]: [www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/cengiz\\_candar/soykirim\\_miydi-1188321#](http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/cengiz_candar/soykirim_miydi-1188321#), (accessed 30th October 2014).

<sup>28</sup> Süleyman Turan, *Misyoloji. Hristiyan Misyon Bilimi* [Missiology. Christian Mission Science], (Ankara: Sarkaç, 2011), 154-67.

### **Developing Good Apologetics and Reducing Wrong Perceptions**

In Christian history accusations have been an occasion to develop well-founded and contextually proper Christian answers. The writings of early Christian apologists like Justin Martyr (d. 165), Melito of Sardes (d. 180) or Irenaeus of Lyon (d. 202) were often written with the purpose of defence against accusations by a heathen environment.

The assumption that Christian mission in Turkey is a part of a political agenda even today may work as a challenge for Christians in Turkey to develop good apologetic responses. The growing number of leading Christians with an ethnic Turkish background in the Protestant community will have to develop a contextually relevant but also biblically founded position towards their own country and towards foreign influences, including the question of what it means to be a citizen of Turkey as a Christian. Question like this are not new. The rich tradition of Orthodox Christian thinking in the country has certainly dealt with similar challenges. But as the still small Turkish Protestant churches are growing, there will be more potential to consider these issues deeply, and to develop biblical political ethics from the historically new perspective of Christians who have no ethnic identity other than the Turkish or the Kurdish one.

Until today most of the small Turkish Protestant churches were founded by foreign missionaries – or at least with their assistance. Recently, one can detect a transition in leadership towards Turkish citizens, most of who are from an ethnic Turkish or Kurdish background. This increasingly local leadership will hopefully find a biblically based balance between appreciating unity and co-operation in the worldwide body of Christ of which they are a part, and developing a strong apologetic based on genuine Turkish experience.

Additionally, the Protestant community in Turkey that consists of local *and* foreign believers must strengthen its consciousness that its hope is the power of Christ and his protection, and not the occasional intervention of western diplomacy on their behalf. There is certainly a place for western Christians or even politicians speaking up on behalf of the Turkish church of Christ. However, being aware of the Turkish suspicion against the western connections of Christians, such advocacy has to proceed with special caution and wisdom.

Copyrighted Material

### **Accepting that Accusations are Part of Persecution**

Doing their best to distance themselves from political agendas and to avoid wrong perceptions, Christians in Turkey should be assured that accusations are a part of the persecution that Jesus Christ predicted for his followers: 'If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also' (John 15:20). For Jesus, to 'insult' and 'say all kinds of evil' against his disciples (Matt. 5:11) is obviously part of persecution, which happens 'because of me [of Christ]' (Matt. 5:11).

In the New Testament we find accusations with political connotations against Jesus himself (John 19:12) and against the apostle Paul (Acts 24:5). We know from early church history that Christians in the Persian Empire of the Sassanian dynasty were horribly persecuted, soon after the enemies of the Persian, i.e. the Roman Empire, had turned to Christianity.<sup>29</sup> They had to suffer because of political accusations – probably without being responsible.

Being confronted with ‘strange-sounding’ accusations against themselves, Christians should not feel ‘as though some strange thing were happening to them’ (1 Pet. 4:12). Charges against Christians may be confused with political arguments. However, if those Christians follow Jesus with a good conscience, they must be assured that they suffer because of their faith in Jesus. As Ripken rightfully states:

One of the greatest gifts that can be given to believers in the midst of persecution is for the believing community to assure them that what they are experiencing is for Christ’s sake and for no other reason.<sup>30</sup>

Christians in Turkey certainly have to do everything that is possible to keep the mission endeavour free of mere political agendas. They have to be wise to avoid misunderstandings. But finally they have to be aware that being accused as Christians cannot be avoided completely and is even an honour, because it is for the name of Jesus.

Copyrighted Material

<sup>29</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia – and how it died* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 56-58.

<sup>30</sup> Nik Ripken, *Servants in the Crucible: Findings from a Global Study on Persecution and the Implications for Sending Agencies and Sending Churches* (2004): <http://nikripen.com/wp-content/themes/nikripen/downloads/Servants%20in%20the%20Crucible.pdf> (accessed 3rd April 2014), 34.

# THE MIDDLE EAST: A REGION WITHOUT A CHRISTIAN FUTURE?

Hanna Josua

## Introduction

We are today confronted with an Islamic world that is undergoing a very turbulent and dreadful time, hardly witnessed before in its history.<sup>1</sup> It extends from the Indian subcontinent through the Middle East and across North Africa. Ancient regimes are collapsing; countries are disintegrating; sectarian, ethnic and racial conflicts are flaring up. Tribes and adherents of certain religious groups, especially the Christian population, are being forcibly deported or coerced into leaving their native countries.

An ISIS video entitled 'A Message Signed with Blood to the Nation of the Cross' was released in February 2015 showing the beheading of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians outside Syria and Iraq. The Coptic victims were clothed in orange suits reminding of the Guantanamo prisoners' clothing. 'This undeniably means,' a report said, 'that the group now views Christian populations as not only targets but also part of the bigger "Crusader plot", not separate from the US-led coalition or aggressors. The group's message is highly intimidating and in some way challenges the western nations to intervene to save the Christians as it intervened to save the Yazidis and others.'<sup>2</sup>

Lebanese authors describe the crisis bluntly: 'Christians live in a twofold crisis: the first is expressed... in the humiliation of the Arabs. The second is the feeling of superiority of the Muslims and the lockout of Christians, an issue that threatens them specifically in their historical existence in the region.'<sup>3</sup> To deal with this issue, Christians hurried to organise religious and societal conferences in various places. The Catholic Church summoned a Synod for the Middle East in October 2010 to discuss with the Patriarchs, Archbishops, Bishops and laymen from all five continents the fate of the

---

<sup>1</sup> 'The Responsibility of the Hero for the disappearance of the peaceful solution', ash-Sharq al-awsat, 30th December 2014, Ntt. 13181: <http://aawsat.com/home/article/254526>

<sup>2</sup> Hasani Gittens, ISIS Releases Video Purportedly Showing Beheading of 21 Egyptian Christians', 15th February 2015: [www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/isis-releases-video-purportedly-showing-beheading-21-egyptian-christians-n306721](http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/isis-releases-video-purportedly-showing-beheading-21-egyptian-christians-n306721)

<sup>3</sup> The Revolution of the Arab Christians, Basil Aoun, 4th February 2012, daily newspaper *an-Nahar*.

Christians in the Middle East. Pope Benedict XVI said: 'It is one of the human rights to live in dignity in one's own home country. Freedom and justice are indispensable for a harmonious existence for all in the region.'<sup>4</sup> In 2012, Pope Tawadros II of the Coptic Church took a similar step by calling upon all Christian denominations in Egypt to build a council, the aim of which, according to Safwat El Bayadi, was 'to create a unified vision on several critical issues such as the legal personal status, the law on houses of worship and several other issues relating to citizenship'.<sup>5</sup>

A more secular conference was held in 2013 in Jordan:

On 27th September, approximately 50 academics, politicians and parliamentarians met in the Jordanian capital Amman for a three-day research conference. They were united by one thing: they were all Eastern Christians. They came from the original Christian groups that remain in the region: from Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. The conference was entitled 'Eastern Christians in Light of the Arab Spring'. Yet, the few papers and recommendations that were presented were sufficient to realise the confusion in the title of the conference, for Christians are not certain that they will remain in the East.<sup>6</sup>

For security reasons, all interviewed emphasised the importance of remaining anonymous.

This chapter will address the difficult question of the future of Christianity in the Middle East and North Africa. The chapter identifies the roots of the crisis of Christians in the Middle East and the status quo of historic Christian churches in the light of the 'Arab Spring' by using paradigms from some countries in the light of religious freedom.<sup>7</sup> The chapter then proceeds to describe the development of human rights issues and at the end makes some suggestions as to how consensus between native Christians and Muslims can be achieved in a trustworthy manner.

This description is given by a native Arab historian and theologian raised in Lebanon who has been involved for the past 34 years of his life in social and diaconal work among Arabic-speaking people from the whole Arab region; he has later migrated to Germany. He has shared at international conferences and visits Arab countries on a regular basis.

One major difficulty the author encounters is the need for caution to avoid endangering the people, churches and institutions concerned in the

Copyrighted Material

<sup>4</sup> Gabriela Maria Mihlig, 'Opening session of the Near East Synod', 11th October 2010: [www.zenit.org/article-21555?l=german](http://www.zenit.org/article-21555?l=german)

<sup>5</sup> 'Egyptian churches to form council to unify views on critical issues', Al-Masry Al-Youm, 3rd March 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Jean Aziz, 'Do Christians Have a Future In the Middle East?' (posted 4th October 2013): *Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East*, 6th February 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Annette Langer, Index on Persecution Worldwide 2015: Where Christians are being antagonized – Wo Christen angefeindet werden: [www.spiegel.de/panorama/gesellschaft/christen-open-doors-veroeffentlicht-weltverfolgungsindex-2015-a-1011553.html](http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/gesellschaft/christen-open-doors-veroeffentlicht-weltverfolgungsindex-2015-a-1011553.html) (accessed 8th January 2015).



respective countries. This makes it difficult to offer more than the skimpy use of footnotes.<sup>8</sup> Most of the sources used are accessible to anyone, unless depending on personal experiences and encounters.

The author is also aware of the fact that dealing with the issue of mission means conversion from Islam to the Christian faith. This addresses the tension between historic churches and younger actively missionary Protestant denominations. In a personal discussion with a high Iranian official, the author was told that Protestant churches in Iran are causing unrest for the other churches. The Iranian government is taking measures to restrict their activities, e.g. by forcing priests of historic churches not to hold their services in the Persian language but in the ancient languages of their churches, which pre-dated Islam in the country and region. In an interview, an expert on multi-religious issues in Iran refers indirectly to this aspect: 'The really dangerous people are those who have converted to Christianity and have joined the ever-increasing Church Movement. According to the specific source, it is said that these house churches are stronger than the Catholic Church in Iran.'<sup>9</sup>

This observation applies to almost every country in the region with a Muslim majority. Therefore, there is no choice for Protestant churches other than to approach the problem of conversion from Islam to the Christian faith in the light of freedom of belief and freedom of conscience. At the same time, it has become an issue that concerns all other Christian denominations due to the lack of differentiation among extremists, as Egypt, Iraq and Syria have witnessed. It is no accident that the Latin Bishops of the Arab Region express their fears by appealing to the regimes in the Arab World in a joint statement:

There is no peace without justice and no justice without respect for the social and religious rights of man and without respect for human dignity. Ultimately there is no peace without forgiveness and reconciliation. The churches and organizations work to make reconciliation in the Middle East a reality. Without true reconciliation based on justice and mutual forgiveness there will be no peace because the same factors that cause the conflict will result in more hatred and wars.<sup>10</sup>

Copyrighted Material

<sup>8</sup> The author intends to use European accessible sources, mainly from Christian bulletins, in order to present the actual situation in the Middle East and North Africa.

<sup>9</sup> Michaela Koller, 'Christen sind Bürger zweiter Klasse': Interview mit dem Iran-Experten Wahdat-Hagh über die Christenverfolgung in Iran (Brussels, 30th October 2009).

<sup>10</sup> 'Kein Friede ohne Vergebung und Versöhnung', 'No Peace without Conciliation', Statement der Konferenz der Lateinischen Bischöfe der Arabischen Regionen (CELRA), Ra's al Chaima (source: *Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem*, 9th October 2014), §1.

In §3 the Bishops plead that the governments ‘respect the cultures and traditions of those people granted residence from the other countries’.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Roots of the Modern Crisis of Christianity**

The roots of the crisis facing Christians of the Middle East and North Africa, expressed in the constant decimation of their numbers, can be sought in several developments going back to the beginning of the 20th century.

The first major event was the genocide of Armenian and the Aramaic Christians in Turkey.<sup>12</sup> Survivors were dispersed in the neighbouring countries and beyond.<sup>13</sup> Native Aramaic Christians who fled the massacre add up to 200,000 in Germany and exceed the number of the whole Christian population in Turkey today.<sup>14</sup> At least half a million Armenians with Turkish origin can be found in France today.<sup>15</sup>

Then there was the emergence of the State of Israel in 1948, causing several Arab-Israeli wars.<sup>16</sup> The defeats of the Arab states were due to western support given to Israel. These wars caused existential confusion among the Arabic-speaking community of the Middle East, disregarding as they did the Christian interests in Palestine and beyond.

Alongside these events, three decisive movements arose, the outcomes of which would determine the fate of the Christians in the region: a secular movement, Arab Nationalism, and two Islamic movements, Sunni and Shi’ite Islamism, i.e. Salafism with all its nuances and ‘Khoumeinism’ in Iran.

Arab Nationalism was strongly influenced by Arab Christians as a reaction to the Turkish nationalism coloured by Islam – and started with a search for a political system under which Arab states independent from the colonial and mandatory powers could be run after the end of World War II. Albert Hourani does not conceal the disenchantment of intellectual Lebanese and Syrian Christians who saw a problem in the influence of the church that was recognised and supported by the state. They considered it to be an obstacle for their spiritual development and freedom of thought.

Copyrighted Material

---

<sup>11</sup> See §3 of the Bishops’ statement.

<sup>12</sup> Farman = Edict of 24th April 1915 ordering the deportation of Armenians.

<sup>13</sup> See Andreas Baumann, *Der Orient für Christus – Johannes Lepsius: Biographie und Missiologie* (Giessen, Germany: Brunnen, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Zentralrat Orientalischer Christen in Deutschland (ZOCD), press release 10.11.2014.

<sup>15</sup> French debate with Turkey on the recognition of the Armenian Genocide of 1915-17.

<sup>16</sup> The wars waged by the neighbouring countries on Israel: 1949, 1956, 1967, 1973; on Lebanese soil: 1978, 1981, 1996, 2000 and 2006.

Therefore, some of them represented a radical secularism.<sup>17</sup> But they also attempted to escape Islamic *sharī'ah* and to enhance a religious and ethnic pluralism. The Baath Party emerged from this movement and seized power in Syria and Iraq. Both parties succeeded to a certain extent in imposing their secular ideologies on the major section of the population of both countries. Unfortunately, left wing-oriented Christians played a significant role in the apparatus of both countries which deepened the roots of antagonism of the Muslim-oriented segments against Christians. Logically therefore, the elimination of Saddam Hussein in 2003 meant simultaneously the loss of political influence and privileges of that political stratum. In conjunction with this, a gradual persecution took place against the Christian minority, which was not completely innocent of the charge of suppression of the Shi'ite majority in Iraq and the Sunni majority in Syria. In the case of Iraq's Christians, three wars nurtured the decrease of Christian presence: the Iraq-Iran War, the first Gulf War and the raid of America on Iraq in 2003.

Parallel to developments in the 20th century, the response on the Sunni side was the rise of political Islam. Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida, Hasan al-Banna, Sayid Quthb and Sayid Abu l-Ala al-Mawdudi laid the foundations of the ideology of modern political Islam, expressed in the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafism. It found fertile soil in the Islamic world, responding to the communist and social-Arab raid in the 'House of Islam', where they gained the upper hand in Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Algeria, South Yemen, Afghanistan and partly in India. The fronts became clear: NATO had to hinder the Soviets from benefitting from the warm waters (Mediterranean and Indian Ocean) and expansion into the emerging countries, and established the Baghdad Pact of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan; after the *coup d'état* of 1958, Iraq left the pact.

With support from the West, as well as from Saudi Arabian 'Wahhabism' and the petro-dollar from several oil-producing countries, upheavals began to take form in several countries. The first confrontation in Egypt in the 1970s between the Muslim Brotherhood and Christians and their properties culminated in the assassination of President Anwar as-Sadat in 1981 by Jihadists. A bid for power by the Muslim Brotherhood in 1981-82 was crushed when Islamists in Algeria made such a bid through the ballot box, and although in 1990 they won the first elections, the army took over and suppressed the new political Islamism. In the meantime, Mujahedeen supporters, with logistic support from the West, managed to defeat the Russians in Afghanistan. The disintegration of the Soviet Union increased the number of Muslim states in the OIC<sup>18</sup> with the emergence of those of Central Asia. A nationalistic and religiously motivated war (1995)

<sup>17</sup> Albert Hourani, *Die Geschichte der arabischen Völker*, translated from English by Manfred Ohi and Hans Sartorius, Frankfurt am Main, October 2000, P.3766-382. Original: *A History of the Arab People*, London, 1991.

<sup>18</sup> Organization of Islamic countries, established 1969.

was then provoked in the Balkans to destroy the last Russian vassal state. Massacres were inflicted upon Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This aggravated Muslims and raised the emotional desire of the masses on the streets of most countries in the Arab and Muslim world to retaliate on behalf of their co-religionists in the Balkans. Tense feelings against the West increased. Painful assaults were directed at tourists and, with increasing hatred, offensive actions against local Christians, especially in Egypt. The self-consciousness of political Islam was growing.

International reaction against al-Qaeda in response to the terror of 11th September 2001 took place in the Muslim world. The campaign created antagonism against local Christians because of the linkage between them and the West. The raid on Iraq in 2003 brought the Shi'ite majority into a new political self-consciousness that would inflame the religious Sunni-Shi'ite conflict. Furthermore, excrescences like caricatures, the speech of Pope Benedict XVI in Regensburg in 2006, along with other events, enflamed antagonistic feelings towards Christians and made them vulnerable to all kinds of suppression.

Are executions and the crucifixions that followed in Saudi Arabia<sup>19</sup> according to the Islamic *sharī'ah* not a defamation of the Christian faith and the seed of what happened in Libya and at the hands of ISIS in ar-Raqqa and elsewhere? Do such events contribute to confidence in the hearts of Christians to feel at ease with the situation and to remain in the Arab world? Does the massacre of 21 Copts (in February 2015, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter) imitate the killing of 21 Copts on New Year's Eve 2011 in a church in Alexandria? Can a message be traced behind the two incidents or can they even be related to the same ideological understanding and regional group? Radwan as-Sayyed suggests:

It is obvious in the Iraqi case that there is a systematic banishment of Christians there. ... The situation in Egypt is in fact different from that in Iraq but the phenomenon is the same... Christians in Egypt suffer from a lack of religious rights, suffer from their neighbours, and suffer from the negligence or at least slackness of the authorities in protecting them... Due to the dispersion of Christians in the whole country, it is therefore the radical Islamists in most cases who initiate assaults against Christians.<sup>20</sup>

After the removal of President Muhammad Morsi in July 2013 and the dismantling of the civil blockade of the Muslim Brotherhood in August, confusion and disturbances spread. Fear overwhelmed the hearts of Christians because something happened to the possessions and homes of Christians in al-Minya that has often affected Christians in the Muslim

<sup>19</sup> Ahmad Ash-Shamlani was executed and then crucified on 29th May 2009. The same fate met another Yemeni person in 2013 in the city of Jizan in Holy Week, 28th March 2013: [www.france24.com/ar](http://www.france24.com/ar)

<sup>20</sup> Radhwan as-Sayyed, 'How long will the campaign persist against the Christians and why?' 4th January 2011: [www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=17&article=602308&issueno=11725](http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=17&article=602308&issueno=11725)

world and would a year later do the same to the Christians of Mosul. The International Society of Human Rights reported: 'On Sunday militant Islamists attacked and burnt houses and commercial buildings of the Christian minority in Ebzet Zakariya, a village in the upper Egyptian province of Minya.'<sup>21</sup> A number of Christian inhabitants were driven from their homes: 'Some violent Islamists, named Jihadists, marked with a coloured spray the houses and buildings of Christians in Upper Egypt, which a few days later were burnt down.'<sup>22</sup>

Khomeinism is the second Islamic movement. The unexpected success of the Khomeini revolution in Iran gave the Shi'ites an impulse for a revival that was soon to be noticed in the Arab and Islamic world and beyond. These religiously motivated politics found fertile soil in Lebanon, Iraq, Bahrain, Yemen and North Africa. The Iraq-Iran War of 1980-88, supported by the Gulf States, was supposed to hinder the spread of the Shi'ite interpretation of the Qur'an and the political influence of the mullahs. However the opposite happened. The Iraq Wars – in 1980-88 against Iran, in 1991 against the World Alliance, and in 2003 with America – weakened the resistance of the Sunnite power to protect the Gulf Region from the overwhelming power of the Shi'ite movement, supported by the population explosion of the Shi'ites. Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Syrian regime and Iraqi Shi'ites built a strategic bridge from Iran to the Mediterranean from where missionary movements were heading to North Africa. No matter how one looks at the war between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006, the masses on the streets of the Arab world saw the war against Israel as a restoration of a lost Arab dignity and identity. The sad result is a gradual evacuation of Christians from South Lebanon and their emigration from the country because Hezbollah with its sophisticated weapons has neutralised the country's politics. It is only a matter of time before the last Christian multi-ethnic and multi-religious state on the continent disappears. Simon Faddoul, president of 'Caritas' in Lebanon summarises the situation:

I should just confirm that we Christians are the largest losers and scapegoats for the development in the Near East... The western engagement in the Middle East is full of contradictions. On the one hand, the West wants to enhance democracies and on the other it supports theocracies. On the one hand, it preaches laicism and the separation of state and religion while on the other it supports countries in which Islam alone is the state religion.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Internationale Gesellschaft für Menschenrechte = International Society for Human Rights.

<sup>22</sup> 'Zahlreiche Häuser der christlichen Minderheit angezündet, Kopten vertrieben. IGFM: Dschihadisten geben Häuser von Christen zur Brandschatzung frei', 30th September 2013: [www.igfm.de/laender/aegypten](http://www.igfm.de/laender/aegypten)

<sup>23</sup> 'We Christians are the losers of the Arab Spring', André Stiefenhofer interviewed the Lebanese Caritas-President, Simon Faddoul, ROM, 26th April 2013, ZENIT.org

### **The Present Situation**

Up to this point, the uprisings have revealed a struggle for power between four major adversaries in Arab societies: political Islam, Islamism, ancient regimes defending the status quo, and liberals and youth striving for freedom and change. Besides all this, we are witnessing a major trend towards ethnic and religious sectarianism between Sunnites and Shi'ites that is governing the behaviour of many conflicting factions in the region. Due to the distress caused by Islamists in several countries, no matter which affiliation they belong to, liberals and the youth have mainly sided with the military power. The director of the Al-Arabia TV channel drastically makes the point when stating: 'From Syria to Mauritania and South Sudan, Arab republics are the outcome of the religious and militant institutions. As long as these two institutions maintain their grip on power, the region will never advance into an era of civilised democracy. The Arab democracy crisis, whether real or assumed, will often lead to repressive regimes, led by religious men or militants.'<sup>24</sup>

The developments leading up to this situation have been greatly influenced by modern technology. Mobilisation and communication have played a major role in the latest developments.<sup>25</sup>

The cradle of the Christian faith is witnessing horrific incidents: confusion, chaos, excessive coercion, use of chemical weapons, abductions and public executions, compulsive deportations and massacres in the 'House of Islam'. This volcanic eruption in the Arab World has shaken the feelings of the Muslims and compelled them to reconsider what is happening within their own house.<sup>26</sup> These developments have also stirred the civilised world deeply. The mass media are kept busy pouring out daily news and images of executions of 'apostates'. What was supposed to be the 'Arab Spring' has abandoned us in Syria with over 300,000 victims and a manifold number of casualties of wounded and physically disabled people. The 'Arab Spring' has resulted in millions of displaced people, whose fate is changing the present demography of the Middle East and North Africa.

### **The Cradle of Christianity at Stake**

This depiction of the situation and the developments endangering the Christian presence in the Middle East show that chaotic events are taking place everywhere so that a massive exodus of Christians to western countries has become irreversible from almost all the countries of the

---

<sup>24</sup> 'Abd Al-Rahman Al-Rashed, website of Alarabiya TV, 26th April 2014, Translation of a special Dispatch of memri, No. 5722

<sup>25</sup> See mainly the role of the TV-channel *Al-Jazeera* in first supporting and fuelling the uprisings, then in presenting the news in a very one-sided manner.

<sup>26</sup> See the letter of 126 Muslim clerics and intellectuals against the leader of IS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, 27.09.2014: <http://lettertobaghdadi.com>

region. Even in the Kurdish region, Christians are not willing to stay any longer for fear of 'the Islamic State'. The vicar of the Syrian town of Qamishly, Abd al-Masih Yusuf, commented on the situation: 'Before the crisis, 5,000 Syrian Orthodox families lived in Qamishly... Since then more than every second person has left and emigrated.'<sup>27</sup>

### *Christianity on the Eve of the 'Arab Spring'*

Already before the beginning of the 'Arab Spring', the European Parliament expressed its concern in the resolution of 20th January 2011 over the critical situation of Christians in the context of freedom of religion in several countries of the Middle East. §1 reads:

The EU condemns the recent attacks on Christian communities in various countries and expresses its solidarity with the families of the victims; expresses its deep concerns about the proliferation of episodes of intolerance, repression and violent events directed against Christian communities, particularly in the countries of Africa, Asia and the Middle East.<sup>28</sup>

And in §4: 'The EU is concerned about the exodus of Christians from various countries, especially Middle Eastern countries, in recent years.'<sup>29</sup>

Historic Oriental Christian churches and individual Christians and families in the Middle East and North Africa have become a target of this tragedy and their destiny is at stake. Former Jordanian information minister, Salah al-Qallab, had already warned the public in 2008 by saying: 'If the harassment of Christians in the region continues, we will soon become like a dying tree. The multicultural [Middle] East, with its variety of possibilities for man to connect to God, will become a large, unyielding, and lifeless rock.'<sup>30</sup>

In the face of this, the Kuwait columnist Ahmad al-Sarraf resorts to bitter sarcasm: he demands that Christians leave the region immediately so that the Muslims can massacre each other. In the newspaper *Al-Qabas*, he wrote: 'Get out, we hate you, we don't want you any more amongst us. We are tired of it all – advancement, civilization, openness, tolerance, love, brotherhood, living friendly together and being considerate. Get out at last!'<sup>31</sup>

The social and infra-structures are evidently breaking down at all levels in some key countries. New political Islamic classes are emerging and trying to gain the upper hand in most countries and are calling for a

<sup>27</sup> Rainer Hermann, 'Die letzten Christen von Qamischli', 24th November 2014.

<sup>28</sup> Situation of Christians in the context of freedom of religion: [www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+20110120+ITEMS+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN#sdocta2](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+20110120+ITEMS+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN#sdocta2)

<sup>29</sup> As previous footnote.

<sup>30</sup> *Al-Rai*, Jordanian daily newspaper, 4th June 2008.

<sup>31</sup> Martin Gehlen, 'Muslimische Intellektuelle begehren auf', Cairo, 30th August 2014.

traditional conservative and literal interpretation of the Qur'an. It is indeed a momentous time in the history of the Arab world that has caused the influential writer in the Gulf Region, Jamal Khashoggi, to ask:

What has gone wrong? ... All those who babble about the foreign conspiracy suppress the truth and close their eyes to our own mistakes... They have mistaken tyranny for stability, they have ignored social impoverishment of peoples, believing religious life to be is passive and inactive; and religion in general to serve to legitimise authority. Yet no one will admit their mistake. Thus the flood of extremism is the only thing that is moving forward.<sup>32</sup>

A brief description of the situation in some countries will serve to illustrate the awkward situation of the historic and Protestant churches in the Middle East. The chosen countries are amongst those where Christianity has existed since its birth. The countries represent the Arab, the Turkish and the Persian world and the survival of Christianity there. Besides this, these countries have been chosen because the displacement of the Christians from them had an immediate impact upon their neighbouring countries and upon the West.

### *Iraq*

The process of the migration of Christians from Iraq began many decades ago, but was accelerated through the war of 2003 and the intimidations thereafter, culminating in a shock by terrorists in the year 2010. After the terrorists' assault on Sayyidat an-Najat [Our Lady of Salvation, a church in Baghdad] that year, it is said that the largest wave of Christian migration from Iraq in modern times began. According to some sources, over 4,000 families left Baghdad within three weeks.<sup>33</sup> Insecurity through car explosions, economic pressure, displacements of ethnic and religious groups robbed the Christians of any reasons to remain in the country. Tom Holland, an author and historian of antiquity, says that 'religious diversity in Iraq and the region is at risk from the extreme interpretations of Sunni Islam espoused by groups such as ISIL. Along with Christians, Shi'a Muslims and ancient sects tracing their history back to Babylonian times, such as the Yazidis and Mandeans, have become subject to persecution and been pressured to flee their native lands'.<sup>34</sup> Holland points to the tragedy of the Iraqi Christians: 'The problem for Christians, though, was that they had no homeland. Now, as the inadequacies of the western model of the nation-

---

<sup>32</sup> Martin Gehlen, 'Muslimische Intellektuelle begehren auf', Cairo, 30th August 2014: [www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2014-08/islamischer-staat-nahost-diskussion](http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2014-08/islamischer-staat-nahost-diskussion)

<sup>33</sup> <http://alhayat.com/Articles/6182410> 11th December 2014.

<sup>34</sup> Nigel O'Connor, 'Iraq's Christian refugees linger in Jordan': [www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/12/iraq-christian-refugees-linger-jordan-20141247496420774.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/12/iraq-christian-refugees-linger-jordan-20141247496420774.html) (last updated 6th December 2014).



state in the Middle East are brutally exposed, they find themselves with nowhere to hide.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, what happened in Mosul and the plain of Nineveh was to be expected. The Arabic letter *NOON*, a symbol for the Nazarenes, i.e. the name for Christians in the Qur'an, spread in the summer of 2014 in the plain of Nineveh and Mosul like fire in the hay, signifying Christian residences. Two weeks later, a swift raid of ISIS against the region brought the Sunnite districts of Iraq under their hegemony. An ultimatum gave Christians three choices: embracing Islam, payment of *jizyah* (the special tax for the people of the book) or death. Nual Ibrahim, a former resident of Mosul, told *Al-Jazeera*: 'They said, "Convert to Islam or die," and they gave us one day to decide, so we fled.'<sup>36</sup> Before the deadline about 1,200 families escaped from their home town, Mosul, leaving behind all their assets and possessions.<sup>37</sup> They were even robbed of their belongings, documents and money. This event, accompanied by the attempt to annihilate the Yazidi religious community, shows how religious minorities have become unwelcome in the region.<sup>38</sup> An Iraqi refugee in Amman, Najem Handaniyeh, said in an interview to *Al-Jazeera*: 'Any Christian still in our home city is now either a Muslim or dead.'<sup>39</sup> The report continues: 'Mosul, which was seized by ISIL this summer, and surrounding towns on the Nineveh Plain, were the heartland of Christianity in Iraq and home to a host of liturgical traditions, ancient monasteries and churches. That history is quickly being eradicated. Qaraqosh, which was the largest Christian city in Iraq and home to 40,000 people, fell to ISIL in August 2014.'<sup>40</sup>

It is obvious, according to Archbishop Warda,<sup>41</sup> that it became easy for the majority of the Sunnite population to collaborate with ISIS, in order to expel their unwanted and alienated neighbours and take their possessions. Archbishop Warda commented: 'The expulsion of Christians from Mosul and the Nineveh Plain was not only a shock: it was genocide. It was a crime against humanity.' It disturbed him that Iraqi Muslims did not distance themselves from 'the Islamic State'. They seemed to be more concerned that the attacks had damaged the international prestige of Islam.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Nigel O'Connor, 'Iraq's Christian refugees linger in Jordan'.

<sup>36</sup> Nigel O'Connor, 'Iraq's Christian refugees linger in Jordan'.

<sup>37</sup> 'Christians after Mosul: The Middle East is not an appropriate place to live in after now.' In Arabic, 23rd August 2014: <http://alhayat.com/Articles/4255410>

<sup>38</sup> Patriarchen der Ostkirchen: 'Christen und andere sind Minderheiten in Gefahr: Beendet die Gewalt' (Fides News, 28th August 2014).

<sup>39</sup> Nigel O'Connor, 'Iraq's Christian refugees linger in Jordan':

[www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/12/iraq-christian-refugees-linger-jordan-20141247496420774.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/12/iraq-christian-refugees-linger-jordan-20141247496420774.html).

<sup>40</sup> Nigel O'Connor, 'Iraq's Christian refugees linger in Jordan'.

<sup>41</sup> Bashar Matti Warda (born 1969 in Baghdad, Iraq) is a Chaldean Catholic cleric and the current Archbishop of Erbil, Iraq.

<sup>42</sup> 'Wir Christen wurden von Bagdad im Stich gelassen', [zenit.org](http://zenit.org), 6th October 2014.

Christians lack confidence and courage, and it is almost impossible for them and other minorities to return to their homes and claim back what they have lost. Jamie Merrill writes:

Father Yako recalls that ‘before Qaraqosh was taken by *Daesh* [Arabic acronym, i.e. IS Islamic State], there were many slogans by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) saying they would fight as hard for Qaraqosh as they would for Irbil. But when the town was attacked, there was nobody to support us’. He says that Christian society in Iraq is still shocked by the way in which the Iraqi and Kurdish governments failed to defend them.<sup>43</sup>

Mounting persecution since 2003 and now the final calamity of ISIS taking Mosul and the Nineveh Plain has convinced many that they can no longer stay there. The Archbishop suspects that even if ISIS can be driven back and Christians can return to their homes, half of them will only stay long enough to sell their property. Almost exactly a hundred years after the Armenian Christians in Turkey were slaughtered or driven into exile, the end has come for the Christian community of Iraq. ‘Have no doubt,’ Archbishop Warda concludes, ‘that the IS massacre is a tragedy.’<sup>44</sup>

The Syrian Catholic Patriarch of Antioch, Ignatius Youssef III Younan, said in an interview with the English edition of *Zenit*, ‘The challenges of the Christian families in Iraq and Syria in the first place lie not so much in carrying out their Christian calling, but how they will survive.’ In conclusion, Younan said he was concerned about the situation of the people in Iraq and Syria, and appealed to the nearest, especially western, countries. He had to continually encourage the people not to give up their hope for democracy, true peace and religious freedom.<sup>45</sup>

In an open letter to the ‘Muslim brothers and sisters’ during an international conference organised by Saudi King Abdullah b. Abd al-Aziz in November 2014 in Vienna, the Chaldaic Patriarch Raphael I called on the leading representatives of the Islamic community ‘to accept responsibility to take up the fight against a grim Islamic extremism, which was a deadly danger for all Christians in the Middle East and no less dangerous also for Muslims’.<sup>46</sup>

### Turkey

History has witnessed similar deportations. The French Consul Diken in Diyarbakir informed his ambassador on 2nd November 1895 about the three days of bloodshed in the city. It was ordered by Abdulhamid II and

<sup>43</sup> Jamie Merrill, *Independent*, 23rd November 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Jamie Merrill, *Independent*, 23rd November 2014.

<sup>45</sup> ‘Patriarch Younan in an interview – Families in the Near East need help’, Rome: zenit.org (original in English), 23rd October 2014.

<sup>46</sup> ‘Irak: “Barbarei im Namen des Islam erinnert an tödliche Ideologien des 20. Jahrhunderts” – Chaldäischer Patriarch fordert Stellungnahme muslimischer Religionsvertreter’: zenit.org, 20th November 2014.

known by his name. ‘Hawar! Hawar!’ (Rescue! Rescue!) shouted the Christians in Kurdish. ‘30,000 dead or missing, 119 villages were turned to ashes. Thousands of stores and private houses of Christians were plundered.’ Diken is being quoted to have said:

It is the final rehearsal of what happened in 1915... On 12th August 1915, the governor of the province Diyarbakir, Vali Dr Mehmed Reshid Bey, received the order from Istanbul to drive out the Christian population to Syria... The Tsherkessic Doctor sent a telegraph on 18th August communicating that he had succeeded in expelling 126,000 people within three days... There are some reports that people were robbed of their clothes and jewelries outside the walls of the city. Everyone could come and do with the people what he wanted. Some took girls and women and married or raped them... According to official statistics dating back to 1914, 72,926 Armenians lived alone in Diyarbakir, 9,660 Catholics, 7,376 Protestants and the rest being Gregorian-apostolic Armenians.<sup>47</sup>

This tragedy occurred in 1915 to both Armenians and Oriental churches in Turkey through a governmental decree legitimising assaults against Christians all over the country. Ursula August, the present German pastor in Istanbul writes:

Today there are hardly any Christians in Turkey... The reasons for this are the pan-Islamic as well as the national Turkish powers and movements. To be more specific, it was the genocide of the Armenians during World War I as well as the exchange of people between Greece and Turkey after the Lausanne Agreement of 1923, by which almost half a million Orthodox Christians had to leave Asia Minor.<sup>48</sup>

The successive Turkish governments have suppressed the recognition of this Christian tragedy. They have neither recognised this dark chapter of their history, nor reconciled themselves with the small minority of Christians left in the country. The country of ‘the seven churches’ of the Revelation has consequently become almost void of its native Christian community. The Turkish government is trying to change historical Christian monuments like transforming former churches into mosques.<sup>49</sup> Even the demonstrations at Taksim Square because of Gezi-Park showed this. The demonstrations were about removing trees, but they did not know that in former times they had been Armenian ruins transformed into a park.<sup>50</sup> The struggle for regaining Christian monasteries like Mor Gabriel in

<sup>47</sup> Mely Kiyak, ‘Die fehlenden Armenier von Diyarbakir’: [www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2013-08/kolumne-tuerkische-tage-diyarbakir-armenien-tuerkei](http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2013-08/kolumne-tuerkische-tage-diyarbakir-armenien-tuerkei) (accessed 9th August 2013).

<sup>48</sup> Ursula August, ‘Toleranz auf Türkisch’, Heft: Ökumene und Auslandsarbeit 2013, 10: [www.ekd.de/international/berichte/90953.html](http://www.ekd.de/international/berichte/90953.html) (accessed 4th May 2015).

<sup>49</sup> Idea-online.de (accessed 29th August 2012).

<sup>50</sup> Fiken Shitirian, ‘Another secret under the Park of Gizi in Istanbul’: <http://alhayat.com/Details/529612> (accessed 5th July 2013).

south-east Turkey is a clear indication of the subtle method of making life uncomfortable for Christians in the country so that they will leave.

August sees the problem of the Christian denominations deeply rooted in the Lausanne Agreement of 1923:

According to the Turkish definition of the Lausanne Agreement, however, the only minority groups were those living in Turkey at the time when the Agreement was signed, i.e. the Armenians, Bulgarians, Greeks and Jews. Not recognised as religious minority groups were the Syrian Orthodox and Catholic United Churches and the Protestant Churches, planted after 1923. Recent foreign Christian churches are in the same way not recognised as falling under the clauses of Lausanne Agreement.<sup>51</sup>

In the same way, proceedings against criminals after the killing of three Christians in Malatya in 2007 shows the obvious unwillingness to punish the transgressors. 'The five perpetrators arrested at the crime scene had already been released from prison in March 2014 and have since been allowed to live at home with their families... During the trial, it became clear that a shadowy nationalistic organisation, known as "Ergenekon", was associated with the attack on the Zirve Publishing House.'<sup>52</sup> August continues her report: 'All non-Muslim minorities in Turkey have a common problem: that many of the rights formulated by the Agreement are not carried out and that people belonging to these minorities are not recognised by law.'<sup>53</sup>

To feel secure, one has to experience a genuine equilibrium. In this connection, Kamal Sido describes an injustice in most of the Muslim states: 'Crimes against Christians must be punished just like all other crimes.'<sup>54</sup> The EU also made recommendations in its demands from the countries of the third world; in §2 the EU demanded this right for Christians and:

Welcomes the efforts made by the authorities of the countries concerned to identify the authors and perpetrators of the attacks on Christian communities; urges the governments to ensure that perpetrators of these crimes and all persons responsible for the attacks, as well as for other violent acts against Christians or other religious or other minorities, are brought to justice and tried by due process.<sup>55</sup>

Nevertheless, missionary societies have not given up the hope that the situation may change: 'The New Life Church in Gaziantep has now become a legal entity through registration as an association.'<sup>56</sup> These positive

---

<sup>51</sup> August, 'Toleranz auf Türkisch', Heft: Ökumene und Auslandsarbeit 2013, 10-11.

<sup>52</sup> www.MEConcern.org (accessed 22nd January 2015).

<sup>53</sup> August, 'Toleranz auf Türkisch', Heft: Ökumene und Auslandsarbeit 2013, 12.

<sup>54</sup> Kamal Sido, Tonja Klausmann, 'Threatened by Changes: Christian Minorities in the Middle East' (Society for Threatened Peoples, March 2014), 19.

<sup>55</sup> www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+20110120+ITEMS+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN#sdocta2

<sup>56</sup> www.MEConcern.org (accessed 4th December 2014).

signals have been put into the right perspective in a prayer request that 'those in authority will respect the freedom and rights of Protestant Christians, churches and workers in Turkey'.<sup>57</sup>

### *Israel / Palestine / Jordan*

The Holy Land has also experienced a tragic exodus of Christians. On the official website of Pope Francis' visit to the Holy Land, the media published this statement: 'The Holy Land is the home of 80,000 Christians who are by their culture and history Palestine Arabs... In 1948 the Christians were about 10% of the Palestine population. Today they are less than 2%.<sup>58</sup> Christians began to emigrate involuntarily from the Holy Land with the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948, the annexation of the West Bank in 1967, the Intifadas, and the erection of the wall. 'The present radicalisation of Muslims has weakened the Christians, especially among the youth, in their desire to remain in the country.'<sup>59</sup>

Gaza Christians have suffered most because of the radicalisation. According to research done by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, about 10,000 Christians lived in Gaza in 1967. Currently, their number does not exceed 1,300. 'If the emigration of Gaza Christians continues, the 1,700 year old Christian fellowship in Gaza will soon become history.' The research describes the importance of Gaza: 'In the fifth century Gaza was an important Christian centre and constituted after Jerusalem the largest conglomeration of monastic life in Palestine.'<sup>60</sup> Spiritual care can only be sustained through foreign help. The study declares: 'Already all the Catholic and Orthodox priests and Protestant clergy come from abroad.'<sup>61</sup>

Christians are a casualty of the military operations between the Egyptian army and the radicals in Rafah:

Several Christian families in Rafah – near the border with the Gaza Strip – found leaflets left on the doorsteps of their homes or shops in September 2012 that asserted that the area was 'an Islamic Emirate' and demanded that all Christians leave within 48 hours... In response, several Christian families left the town. Other Christian residents who worked in the public sector approached their employers and asked to be transferred to another town... This development follows an arson attack against a church in the same town on 2nd January 2011, which also prompted some Christians to leave the town.<sup>62</sup>

We should point out a specific problem for Protestant Christians: although evangelical churches have been active in the Holy Land for many

<sup>57</sup> [www.MEConcern.org](http://www.MEConcern.org) (accessed 4th December 2014).

<sup>58</sup> Lateinisches Patriarchat von Jerusalem, 4th November 2014.

<sup>59</sup> Firas Abedrabbo, [zenit.org](http://zenit.org) (accessed 4th November 2014).

<sup>60</sup> [www.idea.de](http://www.idea.de) (accessed 20th December 2014).

<sup>61</sup> [www.idea.de](http://www.idea.de)

<sup>62</sup> MEConcern.com (accessed 4th October 2012).

years, they are recognised as denominations neither by the Palestinian authorities nor by the Israeli government. The former Secretary General of the World Evangelical Alliance, Geoff Tunnicliffe, in March 2014, drew attention to this issue:

It is more than time that this recognition should be granted. I call upon the government of Israel and the Palestinian authorities to grant this recognition. This is not only a call for justice and democracy but it will also create a more stable context... Treating them as third-class citizens does not empower them to reach such a shared goal or even remain in the land.<sup>63</sup>

In the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Sunnites have become the dominant population, despite the tolerant attitude of the Hashemite dynasty towards the historic churches. The reasons for the decrease of Christians down to 5% of the Jordanian population<sup>64</sup> correlate very closely with those mentioned for Israel and the West Bank. In the year 2014 'the Protestant Grace Church in Amman has been under regular scrutiny because of its extensive work amongst Iraqi and Syrian refugees... In response to questions from intelligence officers as to why so many Muslims attend their church centre, church leaders emphasised that they serve all who are in need, regardless of their religious background'.<sup>65</sup>

### *Iran*

We need to differentiate between traditional ethnic Christians and the new Christian movements in Iran. The Armenian and Syrian Christian churches have more or less adjusted to the situation even if their members are not able to live as they wish: they are systematically discriminated against in education and at the workplace, and the women have to comply with the laws of compulsory use of the veil. The Christians and members of other recognised religions such as the Jews and Zoroastrians are considered *dhimmi*s – second-class citizens – because they do not possess the same rights as the Shi'ites.<sup>66</sup>

Protestant churches and house churches are being raided and believers imprisoned because they are willing to take the risk of accommodating converts and accept the social challenge of welcoming Muslims interested in the Christian faith into their fellowship. Out of several hundreds of examples, it is sufficient to recall the harassment against the church in 1994 after the assassination of Mehdi Dibaj and imprisonment of Haik

<sup>63</sup> MEConcern.org (accessed 23rd October 2014).

<sup>64</sup> Rula Samain, 'Christian emigration: mildest in Jordan vis-à-vis region, but worrying enough. Economic pressures to blame, but other reasons not ruled out': *Jordan Times*, 9th January 2012.

<sup>65</sup> MEConcern.org (accessed 27th November 2014).

<sup>66</sup> Michaela Koller, 'Christen sind Bürger zweiter Klasse', Interview mit dem Iran-Experte Wahdat-Hagh über die Christenverfolgung in Iran: Brussels, *Zenit*, 30th October 2009.

Hovsepian-Mehr. Another recent incident illustrates the point: ‘Seven believers were arrested in Shiraz on 8th February 2012 when their fellowship meeting was raided. An associate was also arrested at the same time in his home. In June 2012 the seven were found guilty of “attending a house church, spreading Christianity, having contact with foreign ministries, propaganda against the regime and disrupting national security”.’<sup>67</sup> The authorities could use any of these accusations against anyone at any given time in order to forbid him and his group to be religiously active. This psycho-terror has its obvious impact upon Christians all over the country. This is why the Syro-Aramaic Iraqi human rights activist, Kamal Sido, appeals to the Pope to defend the Christians of the region: ‘To ensure that the Christians have a future in the Middle East, Pope Francis should advocate unrestricted freedom of belief and equality for all religious and ethnic groups before the law and in the constitutions of their respective countries.’<sup>68</sup>

### Religious Freedom for Christians?

The spiritual development of the individual and free choice of conscience are both part of human rights in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These are ‘irrevocable values that cannot be subject to decisions. Among them are the sanctity of human life, human dignity... and freedom of religion, for which the Christians of our time pay the highest price through discrimination, persecution and elimination’.<sup>69</sup> The tragic consequences for indigenous Christians have already been illustrated. Excerpts from the following report will indicate the urgent need to permit non-Muslims to enjoy freedom of faith and conscience. The ecumenical report on Persecution of Christians 2013 complains about the excessive restrictions on freedom of self-expression for Christians.

It is evident that the restrictions in religious freedom since 2007 have increased, especially in the countries in the area of Saudi Arabia... many countries with a bad reputation can be found in the Middle East and Asia – that is, in regions where one religion has privileges and others are excluded. The examples of these countries lead one to the conclusion that the restrictions come from the government hand-in-hand with social circumstances and are often strengthened by their interaction. Christians are particularly pressured when they represent a minority in authoritarian states.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> [www.meconcern.org](http://www.meconcern.org) (accessed 17th November 2014).

<sup>68</sup> Kamal Sido, Tonja Klausmann, ‘Threatened by Changes: Christian Minorities in the Middle East’ (Society for Threatened Peoples, March 2014), 19.

<sup>69</sup> *Zenit*, online-dienst (accessed 22nd December 2011, author’s translation).

<sup>70</sup> ‘Ökumenischer Bericht zur Lage der Religionsfreiheit von Christen 2013’, 53. Bericht wurde am 1 juli 2013 in Berlin von Bischof Martin Schindehütte und Erzbischof Dr Ludwig Schick vorgestellt.



Despite this, 'liberal Muslims say that there is no compulsion in Islam. But according to Islamic law, it is not permitted for a Muslim to defect from his religion, because the Qur'an is the last valid Word of Allah. In Iran, this means that there is neither religious freedom nor freedom of conscience. It follows logically that every other kind of freedom is lacking: rights for women cannot exist in the Islamic Republic of Iran, nor can there be freedom of the press. The right to meet together and form an organisation is affected too. Even more so, the right for an apostate to live at all is annulled. Since the time when all laws in Iran were derived from Islamic Law, freedom of faith and conscience are forbidden by the Constitution'.<sup>71</sup>

This applies to almost every Islamic state in the region. Until 2010, Egyptian Christians were forced to abide by these restrictions until they decided that they 'do not want to cope with old tradition any more, that says they have to apply for permission from the president of the state to install a new church building or renovate an old one'.<sup>72</sup> The European Parliament has called attention to the need for granting minorities in the Islamic world freedom of faith and conscience. Even before the upheavals in the Arab World, one could read: 'The EU Parliament strongly condemns all acts of violence against Christians and other religious communities, as well as all kinds of discrimination and intolerance based on religion and belief against religious people, apostates and non-believers; and stresses once again that the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a fundamental human right'.<sup>73</sup> The Parliament has committed itself to the support of Christian affairs through its institutions.

The prohibition or restriction on financial aid, other than money that accrues to the state, poses serious difficulties to civic and religious societies, affecting non-governmental organisations. In post-Revolutionary Egypt, 44 persons were charged with illegal 'foreign financing' and 'missing permissions', among them various foreigners and the head of the (German) Konrad Adenauer Foundation's office.<sup>74</sup> The arbitrariness of state permission creates a climate of insecurity and fear. In Bahrain in 2007, Indian Anglican congregations and Pentecostal churches had to obtain an

Copyrighted Material

<sup>71</sup> Michaela Koller, 'Christen sind Bürger zweiter Klasse': Interview mit dem Iran-Experte Wahdat-Hagh über die Christenverfolgung in Iran (Brussels, 30th October 2009).

<sup>72</sup> Radhwan as-Sayyed, 'How long will the campaign persist against the Christians and why?': [www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=17&article=602308&issueno=11725](http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=17&article=602308&issueno=11725) (accessed 4th January 2011).

<sup>73</sup> Situation of Christians in the context of freedom of religion: [www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+20110120+ITEMS+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN#sdocta2](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+20110120+ITEMS+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN#sdocta2), §3.

<sup>74</sup> <http://newsletterversand.zeit.de/go/15/IBK7QF3-1V4ZW9G-1V4ZW9L-19MXW8N.html> (accessed 7th February 2012).



official permit and were threatened with forceful eviction.<sup>75</sup> The arbitrary detention of clergymen and lay members of congregations and house searches also create a climate of fear and intimidation.<sup>76</sup>

Sometimes the complete Christian population is held liable, as when in Egypt a Christian attracts the wrath of the Muslim majority, e.g. because of a picture of a Muslim woman on his mobile phone or, for other 'offences', often all Christian families are cast out of the village. The times for Sunday services are also restricted. In order to restrict attendance, the Iranian government outlawed services on Fridays, the public holiday.<sup>77</sup> Accusations of immoral behaviour are also made: in Saudi Arabia, the police frequently dissolves home congregations of Christian foreign workers under the pretext of 'illicit mingling' of men and women<sup>78</sup> or of holding a dance party.<sup>79</sup>

### Conversions to the Christian Faith

The plea for freedom leads us to reflect upon one of the most awkward issues for Muslims in Christian-Muslim dialogue. It is also a point of disagreement between the churches themselves, because of their differing understanding of mission. One thing is certain: Muslims are becoming Christians! This challenge has exposed many historic Oriental churches to serious problems with Protestant churches. The reasons are plausible: increasing government pressures have been laid upon the churches to stop these activities because, for centuries, the historical churches have been the natural addressees in the Arab world. The Oriental and Catholic churches want to maintain certain privileges. Protests are involved too on account of a strict interpretation of Islamic *shari'ah* on apostasy and defection from Islam. Although it is forbidden for Christians to do missionary work among Muslims, it is rather Muslims who demand to become Christians, led by their own independent convictions. Due to globalisation, churches and states are confronted with the phenomenon of conversion and with a new understanding of freedom of conscience and freedom of belief.<sup>80</sup>

Therefore all Oriental churches are facing the inescapable decision to redefine their position regarding mission among Muslims. The ruling Anti-Mission-Codex in most of the Christian-Islamic Round Tables that is categorically separating mission from dialogue and seeing mission as religious intolerance, has to be removed. An embargo on Christian mission

<sup>75</sup> 'Kirchen droht Zwangsäumung – Gemeinden sollen binnen zwei Wochen Genehmigung nachweisen', in: idea-online-dienst (accessed 29th November 2007).

<sup>76</sup> E.g. the imprisonment of the pastor of the Assyrian Evangelical Church of Kermanshah, Iran, mec-online-dienst (accessed 23rd February 2010).

<sup>77</sup> mec-online-dienst (accessed 16th November 2009).

<sup>78</sup> mec-online-dienst (accessed 10th February 2012).

<sup>79</sup> idea-online-dienst (accessed 5th August 2008).

<sup>80</sup> *International Journal for Religious Freedom*, 3/2010, 13-38.

– for whatever reason – means the self-abandonment of Christian self-concepts. Thereby, the dialogue degenerates in the West into monologues and in the East the urge for Christians to obey and abide by the *shari'a*. An affirmation of conversion is a touchstone for a real and honest dialogue. If dialogue aims at an understanding among religions, there must mutual respect. This means that choosing how to live one's life is a purely personal decision.

Missionary activities and public Christian events are generally prohibited, but especially when those activities touch upon Islamic matters. This means that it is forbidden for Christians to defend themselves against false accusations made against their faith; they must keep silent, for fear of the blasphemy law that has become a potent weapon causing many conflicts.

Laws against blasphemy are often used as an excuse for hindering the activity of academics, dissidents, reformers and human rights' activists. They restrict freedom of thought and seek to build a closed mentality regarding religion.<sup>81</sup> For example, the Algerian penal code punishes 'insulting the Prophet and other messengers of Allah or the defamation of the faith or the principles of Islam'.<sup>82</sup> The charge of insulting Islam or the Prophet Muhammad is extremely subjective and can be brought forward arbitrarily. In some countries, such as Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and Somalia, not only blasphemy but also conversion automatically entails capital punishment. When migration to another country is allowed, as in the case of the Afghan convert Abdurrahman in 2006, it is not because of human rights concerns, but due to exceptions regulated by *shari'a*, such as declaring the convert insane.<sup>83</sup>

In Algeria, imprisonment between two and five years awaits anyone who:

incites, constrains or uses means of seduction tending to convert a Muslim to another religion, or by using to this end establishments for teaching, for education, for health, of a social or cultural nature, or training institutions, or any other establishment, or any financial means... and makes, stores, or

Copyrighted Material

<sup>81</sup> 'Religionsfreiheit droht Erstickungsgefahr', recension of Paul Marshall and Nina Shea, 'Silenced: How Apostasy and Blasphemy Codes are Choking Freedom Worldwide' (Oxford University Press); the authors direct the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom: zenit online-dienst (accessed 16th January 2012).

<sup>82</sup> Similarly in Kuwait: Stoyan Zaimov: 'Offending' God, Qur'an or Muhammad Could Mean Death for Kuwait's Muslims, in *Christian Post*, 4th May 2012: [www.christianpost.com/news/offending-god-quran-or-muhammad-could-mean-death-for-kuwaits-muslims-74372/](http://www.christianpost.com/news/offending-god-quran-or-muhammad-could-mean-death-for-kuwaits-muslims-74372/). Eine erstmalige Verurteilung bedeutet eine fünfjährige Haftstrafe, im Wiederholungsfall droht die Todesstrafe.

<sup>83</sup> [www.afghantimes.com/AbdulRahman.wmv](http://www.afghantimes.com/AbdulRahman.wmv)

distributes printed documents or audio-visual productions or by any other aid or means, which has as its goal to shake the faith of a Muslim.<sup>84</sup>

Frequently, the charge of apostasy is connected with the accusation of spreading Christianity and acting against the state, and in Turkey also for insulting 'Turkishness'.<sup>85</sup>

Muslims who become Christians are as a matter of principle unable to register their new religious denomination on their identification papers. Egypt's most famous convert to Christianity, the journalist Muhammad Hegazy, who became a Christian at the age of 16, has been fighting for this in public for years.<sup>86</sup>

The baptism of the prominent Egyptian journalist, Magdy Christiano Allam, who was baptised by Pope Benedict XVI in St Peter's Basilica on Easter morning 2008,<sup>87</sup> brought about furious reactions in the Muslim world, but it was a clear sign by a Christian church in the West that baptism of converts should no longer be performed in secret but as a public act, even in the Arab world.

The categorisation of populations into Muslim and non-Muslim, believer and unbeliever, creates a climate of intolerance in a society that ought to treat its citizens equally in order to avoid a dual-class society. Apostates are shaking this dualistic worldview by daring to express their religious opinions openly. An evaluation of non-Muslims – who are not part of the Islamic *umma* – concerning their civil rights and state affiliation should be reconsidered. Shortly after the Egyptian Revolution in January 2011, al-Azhar, the highest Sunni authority, based in Cairo, issued a document entitled 'Renewal' with extensive suggestions for reform, including the equal treatment of Muslims and non-Muslims, but it was met with widespread disapproval.<sup>88</sup>

The classification of apostates as traitors is unacceptable. One who is not a Muslim cannot claim the full rights of citizenship. The person who actively turns away from Islam has, in the eyes of many Muslim theologians and citizens, thereby renounced his loyalty to the state and is guilty of treason or betrayal of his country.<sup>89</sup> This serious accusation ought to be addressed by the church, when defending converts before the courts in

<sup>84</sup> 'New Regulations concerning the conditions and rules for the exercise of religious worship other than Muslim', Algeria, 2006 – ruling number 06-03 of 29 Moharram 1427 / 28 February 2006.

<sup>85</sup> *mec-online-dienst* (accessed 19th October 2009).

<sup>86</sup> *Zenit*, 27th April 2010: [zenit.org/article-20399?l=german](http://zenit.org/article-20399?l=german); *idea-online-dienst* (accessed 30th August 2007).

<sup>87</sup> 'Osternacht im Petersdom: Benedikt XVI. tauft bekannten muslimischen. Konvertiten Magdi Allam, "Il Corriere della Sera"', 23rd March 2008: [www.zenit.org/article-14780?l=german](http://www.zenit.org/article-14780?l=german)

<sup>88</sup> [www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=343007](http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=343007)

<sup>89</sup> Christine Schirmacher: 'Defection from Islam, A Disturbing Human Rights Dilemma', in *International Journal for Religious Freedom*, 3/2010, 15.

the West, and also be taken up as a political issue that demands to be regulated in the centres of power in the Islamic world.

Converts from Christianity to Islam are celebrated and viewed as proof of the superiority of Islam. But converts from Islam to Christianity cause hysterical reactions. This provokes the question: Do Muslims consider their *umma* so vulnerable and endangered that a few apostates are feared so much?

The Catholic 'Church in Need' (*Kirche in Not*) published a general analysis on 'Religious Freedom in the World 2014',<sup>90</sup> which describes the events between 2012 and the summer of 2014 and comes to the following conclusions:

That there has been deterioration everywhere where there have been changes with regard to religious freedom.<sup>91</sup> One can speak of an improvement in only six of the 196 countries: in Iran, the United Emirates, Qatar, Zimbabwe and Taiwan. Nevertheless the degree of persecution in these countries is reckoned to be 'high' or 'medium'.<sup>92</sup>

Three out of six countries have in their constitutions Islam as the state religion. In addition, an extract of the report has been published in English which describes religious intolerance and persecution in twenty of these countries as 'high'. In fourteen of these countries religious persecution is related to Islamic extremism: in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Libya, the Maldives, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.<sup>93</sup>

### Trustworthy Measures

At a conference on the Middle East, Jean Aziz asked, 'What are the possible ways of dealing with what has become one of the greatest humanitarian catastrophes of our time?'<sup>94</sup> A female Christian parliamentarian at the conference commented on injustice towards Christians in the *shari'a*: 'Inequality in divorce and inheritance rights is absolute: Women are entitled to half of what is given to men. In the absence of a clear heir, the property of a deceased person goes to the Islamic *waqf*. Yet, for deceased Christians, it goes to the state and not to the Christian *waqf*.'<sup>95</sup>

A Jordanian priest, Rifat Bader, of the Catholic Center for Studies and Media, comments: 'The school curriculum ignores completely indigenous

<sup>90</sup> John Pontifex, Chief Editor of the Report: [www.religionsfreiheit-weltweit.at](http://www.religionsfreiheit-weltweit.at)

<sup>91</sup> Religionsfreiheit in vielen Ländern der Welt bedroht, 4th November 2014.

<sup>92</sup> [zenit.org](http://zenit.org) (accessed 4th November 2014). These figures are based on the research of Open Doors.

<sup>93</sup> [zenit.org](http://zenit.org) (accessed 4th November 2014).

<sup>94</sup> Jean Aziz 'Do Christians Have a Future In the Middle East?', posted 4th October 2013 – *Al-Monitor: the Pulse of the Middle East*, 6th February 2015.

<sup>95</sup> Aziz, 'Do Christians Have a Future?'

Christians who have been living in the region since the time of the apostles. How can children learn to respect each other when the other is not even mentioned in the school books?’<sup>96</sup> The Syrian Catholic bishops made demands in their annual Synod (in 2014) ‘that places of education should revise their curriculum to delete discriminating contents with regard to non-Muslims’.<sup>97</sup> The initiative taken by al-Azhar University is a truly positive sign. Here a high authority proclaims that terror in the name of religion does not belong to the Muslim identity. Pope Francis appeals to the Islamic world to examine and take measures against the misdeeds of radical Islamists: ‘Before religious fundamentalism destroys people and terrible massacres occur, it rejects God himself, in that it makes Him into a mere ideological excuse.’<sup>98</sup> He continues to express to the diplomatic corps his hopes ‘that the political, religious and spiritual leaders, in particular the Muslim, should condemn every fundamentalist and extremist interpretation of religion which leads to the justification of such acts of violence’.<sup>99</sup>

Could the hope of the Pope stop the massive emigration from the Middle East and shake those in charge of political decision-making? Pope Francis tried to encourage Christians by showing them how to play a positive role in their own home countries, appealing to them by saying: ‘Most of you live among a Muslim majority. With your ability to differentiate, you can help your Muslim fellow-citizens to show an authentic picture of Islam, that many of them wish for, who continually say that Islam is a religion of peace and is in accordance with respect for the Rights of Man, and demand that everyone can live together. That will be useful to them and to the whole of society.’<sup>100</sup>

To the diplomats the Pope said: ‘I wanted with my Christmas letter to express to the Christian churches and organisations in the Middle East my personal concern and assurance of prayer. They are giving a valuable testimony of faith and courage, and are playing an important role as peacemakers and assisting further reconciliation and development in the respective civic societies to which they belong. A Middle East without Christians would be a distorted and mutilated Middle East.’<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> Fides (accessed 24th November 2014).

<sup>97</sup> ‘Libanon: Prinzipien der ‘Erklärung von al-Azhar’ umsetzen’: zenit.org (accessed 11th December 2014).

<sup>98</sup> ‘Ein Naher Osten ohne Christen wäre ein entstellter und verstümmelter Naher Osten!’ – Neujahrsempfang im Vatikan für das Diplomatische Korps’: Zenit.org (accessed 12th January 2015).

<sup>99</sup> As previous footnote.

<sup>100</sup> ‘Aus dem Vatikan, am 21. Dezember 2014, dem vierten Adventssonntag. FRANZISKUS’, zenit.org (accessed 23rd December 2014).

<sup>101</sup> ‘Ein Naher Osten ohne Christen wäre ein entstellter und verstümmelter Naher Osten!’ – Neujahrsempfang im Vatikan für das Diplomatische Korps’, zenit.org (accessed 12th January 2015).

These expectations cannot be realised either without an active engagement of the Muslim majority in the Arab countries or without an authentic Muslim understanding that the Christian community has always been a genuine enrichment for Islamic society. Only by reckoning that there is a desperate need for social change, and by carrying out courageous amendments in the conventional thinking of the religious establishment in Muslim societies, would there be any conviction for Christians to endure for the sake of a promising future for them and for the generations after them.

The church must preserve and sharpen its Christian profile. Only a church that is self-confident and strong in its foundation can face the challenges of Islam, and stand fast and act in an winsome manner to outsiders. It should listen to an Oriental church leader, the Melkite Patriarch of Antioch: 'We should be rooted deeper in our faith, and present and live it in a shining manner.'<sup>102</sup> From Oriental churches we can see what perseverance means. The readiness to remain steadfast and to pay the price of faith in martyrdom distinguishes Oriental churches and in particular congregations of converts. When afflicted from outside, they close their ranks beyond the borders of denominations and become focused on the priorities.

Copyrighted Material

---

<sup>102</sup> Interview with the head of the Melkite-Catholic Church in the Middle East, Patriarch Gregor III, Laham of Antiochia, 'Christen im Nahen Osten: Salz, Licht und Sauerteig', *Zenit*, 20th December 2011.

# CASE STUDY: ISRAEL AND MESSIANIC JEWS

Dan Sered and Yoel Ben-David

## Introduction

Should a list ever be compiled of the most significant substances that are found on this planet, it is to be hoped that blood will be among the top ten. Blood unifies much of life, and not surprisingly is considered in the Pentateuch as the locus of life's essence.<sup>1</sup> Yet blood has also been looked upon as something that differentiates family from family, and race from race. 'Blood' is a concept has been used to separate people and cause division. In popular parlance, some retain an elevated status in society by virtue of having 'blue blood'; others have fought each other because 'bad blood' existed between them.

This imagery of blood is equally present in the world of the Jewish people. While the Jewish people are more properly described as an ethnic group than a race, Jewishness is determined by the bloodline. Specifically, Jewish religious authorities maintain that a person is Jewish if his or her mother is Jewish (some branches of Judaism also accept patrilineal descent). One of the key issues in the evangelistic ministry with which the authors are involved, Jews for Jesus,<sup>2</sup> is helping people to understand that faith and ethnicity are not the same, for traditional Judaism teaches that for Jewish people ethnicity determines their religion, or what their religion ought to be.

Certainly, in the authors' part of the world, Israel-Palestine, everyone agrees on at least one thing: too much blood has been spilled – spilled for countries, spilled for freedom, spilled for politicians, spilled for God.

In Israel today there reside several peoples, religions and identities, some of which will be mentioned in this chapter. From one community to the next, there are a variety of levels of religious freedom as well as of expressions of Christian mission. Yet in each community are men, women and children, created in God's image, with the same living blood that flows through their hearts, all of whom have been offered the life-giving blood of Jesus. As a traditional Jewish sentiment phrases it, in explaining that no one person is better or more worthy of life than another, 'Who says your blood is redder?'<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Lev. 17.11.

<sup>2</sup> [www.jewsforjesus.org](http://www.jewsforjesus.org)

<sup>3</sup> b. *Pesachim* 25b.

The authors have endeavoured to include a variety of groups in this discussion. We have done our best to discover the nature of freedom of speech – as well as freedom of conversion – in the State of Israel, which is a parliamentary democracy; in the West Bank, which is governed by the Palestinian Authority (PA); and in Gaza, ruled by Hamas. Also, because Judaism is the dominant religion in Israel, we will also cover some of Judaism's perspectives on Christian mission. We will assume, however, that the reader is aware of the perspectives of Islam (the dominant religion in the West Bank and Gaza) regarding missionaries, or can find out from those who have specialised in that subject.

### The West Bank

It should be said from the outset that, while the authors both know many stories about individuals who have been connected with the PA, our research taught us much and was perspective-changing. In this section we rely heavily upon interviews and writings by D. Alexander Miller<sup>4</sup> and Philip E. Sumpter.<sup>5</sup>

In an article for *St Francis Magazine*,<sup>6</sup> Miller is very clear concerning the rights of Muslims to leave Islam and convert to faith in Jesus. From the perspective of the PA, religious freedom should be observed until such freedom intersects with *shari'a* law. Two issues are involved here. First, the PA's Constitution<sup>7</sup> sees *shari'a* law as the basis for all legal decisions within its territories. Second, the PA continues to maintain that it upholds a form of religious freedom even though their standard falls short of a western understanding of the term.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, given a western understanding

---

<sup>4</sup> Miller is lecturer in Church History and Theology and Director of Publications for Nazareth Evangelical Theological Seminary.

<sup>5</sup> Sumpter is Adjunct Professor of Old Testament at the European School of Culture and Theology (Korntal, Germany) and has taught at Nazareth Evangelical Theological Seminary.

<sup>6</sup> Duane Alexander Miller, 'The 1938 Riggs Report on the "Near East Christian Council Inquiry on the Evangelization of Moslems": an aborted beginning to the Insider Movement strategy', *St Francis Magazine* 9.2 (April 2013), 65-68: [www.stfrancismagazine.info/ja/images/stories/sfmapr2013%20-4.pdf](http://www.stfrancismagazine.info/ja/images/stories/sfmapr2013%20-4.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> This is a term used by many for the Palestinian Basic Law. See US Department of State, 'International Religious Freedom Report for 2013: Israel and the Occupied Territories – The Occupied Territories': [www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?dynamic\\_load\\_id=222295&year=2013#wrapper](http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?dynamic_load_id=222295&year=2013#wrapper)

<sup>8</sup> Duane Alexander Miller, 'Freedom of Religion in Israel-Palestine: May Muslims Become Christians, and Do Christians Have the Freedom to Welcome Such Converts?', *St Francis Magazine* 10.1 (April 2014), 17-24: [www.stfrancismagazine.info/ja/images/stories/is-it-possible\\_%20Muslims-becoming-Christians-in-Israel-Palestine.pdf](http://www.stfrancismagazine.info/ja/images/stories/is-it-possible_%20Muslims-becoming-Christians-in-Israel-Palestine.pdf). In 'Freedom of Religion', 18, Miller confirms this, mentioning an interview with a Muslim lawyer in Bethlehem who both defends the PA's religious freedom status while denying the right for a Muslim to become a Christian.



of the word 'freedom', we should conclude that there is no such freedom in Islam. This would be inconsequential were it only a matter of a country's internal communication being misunderstood by outsiders. However, the claim to religious freedom is not made to their own constituency, but to the outside world. It clearly represents a desire of the PA to appease western opinion even as it clearly does not adhere to western standards.

We should clarify that Miller does not claim that either persecution or a death sentence will be forthcoming from the PA itself in regard to a Muslim who becomes a Christian. However, he does assert that, 'Even if the state turns a blind eye to their apostasy, their family may well take matters into their own hands.'<sup>9</sup> The latter may include ostracising, abusing or killing any who have turned from following 'the Prophet'.

At this point that it is important to remember that issues of religion and family identity, while of great importance in some Israeli families, are much more central to Palestinians. For Palestinians, the concepts of honour and shame, and the family name, strongly influence their perception of truth. It is rare that an individual will think through issues of truth apart from the community's opinion and respect being accorded to the proper authority structures. While the same phenomenon exists in Jewish circles as well, it is found only among the Orthodox, who represent a minority in Israel (see further below).

Many in the West may assume that if the convert makes it alive to the doors of a church, he or she will be safe. Yet this is far from the truth in the PA, and especially (as we will see later) in Gaza. Churches in Palestinian-controlled areas are very concerned about the reactions of Muslims to their taking in of a convert. In most cases, converts or seekers will not be welcomed. Miller succinctly states the reason for this thinking when he writes, 'Thus the freedom of the Muslim to leave Islam, and the freedom of the church to welcome the convert were seen as less valuable than that of sustaining of an image of united Palestinian-ness.'<sup>10</sup> It appears that in the PA, churches believe that they need to maintain a united Arab front with their Muslim neighbours in order to prevent persecution and to keep the peace. This is true not only in receiving new converts but also when employing them.

Miller and Sumpter expanded their work on religious freedom in Arab-speaking parts of Israel-Palestine in *Between the Hammer and the Anvil*.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Miller, 'Freedom of Religion', 18.

<sup>10</sup> Miller, 'Freedom of Religion', 18.

<sup>11</sup> Duane Alexander Miller and Phillip Sumpter, 'Between the Hammer and the Anvil: Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land'. Paper presented at a conference in Rome on 'Christianity and Freedom: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives', 12th-14th December 2013: [www.academia.edu/5437085/Between\\_the\\_Hammer\\_and\\_the\\_Anvil\\_Palestinian\\_Christians\\_in\\_the\\_Holy\\_Land](http://www.academia.edu/5437085/Between_the_Hammer_and_the_Anvil_Palestinian_Christians_in_the_Holy_Land)

In that work they mention the *Kairos Document* (2009),<sup>12</sup> which was signed by many Christian leaders and focused on the injustices of the Israeli Occupation. However, what was not included in the *Kairos Document*, and what some Christians feel *should* have been noted,<sup>13</sup> is the abuse that some Muslims visit upon the Christian community in the PA. Miller and Sumpter believe that the failure to include this fact is, again, because of the need in the West Bank to maintain Arab/Palestinian unity. Yet these abuses by the PA are causing the increasing shrinkage of the Christian community.<sup>14</sup>

Let us add that, however indirectly, the State of Israel is part of the religious freedom problem in the West Bank. Much of the extremism is caused by the ongoing oppression in the West Bank by Israel. For example, Israel is able to cut off electricity at short notice to the Palestinians.<sup>15</sup> Palestinian society as a whole is in need of justice. Not least, the strong feelings of 'sticking together' and 'unity' in Palestine that we have mentioned above are in part a result of the fact that Israel and the Palestinians do not form two separate and independent countries; Israel is in control of what happens in Palestine. Thus, Palestinians reactions to converts to Christianity and to political events are those of a people who are working through their own narratives and thinking through their historiography vis-a-vis Israel.<sup>16</sup>

### The Gaza Strip

War is tragic and points graphically to the fallen nature of humanity. It is sometimes only when we reflect on this reality that we remember that Christian mission – or rather Christ – is the only hope. Following the events of the 2014 conflict between Israel and Hamas, the situation in the Gaza

<sup>12</sup> [www.kairospalestine.ps/content/kairos-document](http://www.kairospalestine.ps/content/kairos-document) – also known by its full title, 'A moment of truth: A word of faith, hope, and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering'.

<sup>13</sup> Miller and Sumpter, 'Between the Hammer and the Anvil', 26-27. Note e.g.: '*But in 16 pages of single-space print, there is not a single mention of the intolerance and even violence that Christians in Palestine experience at the hands of some Muslims*' (italics original), 26.

<sup>14</sup> Miller and Sumpter, 'Between the Hammer and the Anvil', 10, who report that between 1946 and the 1990s, the Christian percentage of the Palestinian population went from 8% in Israel-Palestine to 2.6% 'of the entire population' in the State of Israel and 'possibly' 1.5% in the Occupied Territories.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. Isabel Kershner, 'With Palestinian Debt Rising, Israeli Utility Briefly Reduces Power to West Bank', *New York Times* (23rd February 2015): [www.nytimes.com/2015/02/24/world/middleeast/with-debt-owed-rising-israeli-utility-briefly-reduces-power-on-west-bank.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/24/world/middleeast/with-debt-owed-rising-israeli-utility-briefly-reduces-power-on-west-bank.html)

<sup>16</sup> For more on this topic, see Salim J. Munayer and Lisa Loden, *Through My Enemy's Eyes: Envisioning Reconciliation in Israel-Palestine* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2013).

Strip as we write (early 2015) is horrendous. Widely-reported data state that Gaza has been set back twenty years.<sup>17</sup> Apartment buildings which just six months ago had electricity and warm water now stand with no roof, let alone other necessities. This reality has made our research for this paper more difficult. In this section we rely on the report *Hidden Injustices* published by the Jerusalem Institute of Justice (JIJ) in November 2012.<sup>18</sup> Given both the severity of the current situation and the fact that much of the information available to us is over two years old, we believe that conditions in Gaza are even worse than what we describe below.

Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, is an Islamic organisation. Gaza is therefore dominated by Islam. Article 31 of the Hamas Charter<sup>19</sup> allows Christians to live peacefully under Islamic rule. However, because Hamas declares the Qur'an to be its Constitution, and the way of Islam to be its way of life, the rights of Christians are limited and conditional on Islamic laws, and the number of Christians residing in the Gaza Strip is decreasing.

Shortly after Hamas gained control over the Gaza Strip in 2006, its gunmen used rockets and hand grenades to demolish the doors of the Latin Church and the adjacent Rosary Sisters School in Gaza City. Before setting both buildings on fire, Hamas forces burned copies of the Christian scriptures.<sup>20</sup> In 2007, members of Hamas set fire to the Bible Society bookstore in Gaza City and later kidnapped and murdered the 31-year old storeowner, Rami Ayad, who left behind a wife and two small children. Ayad's body was found mutilated in a nearby field.<sup>21</sup> Hamas' use of power and threats have become a reality for Gaza's Christian population, and most of them have emigrated from the Gaza Strip for fear of their lives.

In the context of this paper, the intention of highlighting these current realities is not primarily to motivate readers to become more politically active – though we hope all Christians will do their civic duty – but to encourage prayer that the church will be moved to thoughtful action in and

<sup>17</sup> See e.g. 'Rebuilding Gaza will take 20 years', *Daily Telegraph*, 31st August 2014: [www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/breaking-news/rebuilding-gaza-will-take-20-years-group/story-fni0xqlk-1227042610031](http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/breaking-news/rebuilding-gaza-will-take-20-years-group/story-fni0xqlk-1227042610031), and widely reported in other outlets.

<sup>18</sup> 'Hidden Injustices: A review of PA and Hamas Human Rights Violations in the West Bank and Gaza' (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute of Justice, 2012): <http://jij.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Hidden-Injustices.-Human-Rights-in-the-PA-7.4.13.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/hamas.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp)

<sup>20</sup> Steven Erlanger, 'Gazans Adjust to Power Shift as New Rulers Revel in Their Victory', *New York Times*, 20th June 2007: [www.nytimes.com/2007/06/20/world/middleeast/20gaza.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/20/world/middleeast/20gaza.html)

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. Catrin Ormestad, 'I know how to make you a Muslim', *Haaretz* (1st November 2007): [www.haaretz.com/weekend/magazine/i-know-how-to-make-you-a-muslim-1.232309](http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/magazine/i-know-how-to-make-you-a-muslim-1.232309) and Sherry [no surname], 'Christian life in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank', Catherine of Siena Institute, 26th October 2007: [www.siena.org/October-2007/christian-life-in-the-gaza-strip-and-the-west-bank](http://www.siena.org/October-2007/christian-life-in-the-gaza-strip-and-the-west-bank)

for Israel-Palestine. There is no freedom of belief in the Gaza Strip outside of Hamas' ideology and religion. As already noted, the situation is probably even worse following the 2014 summer war. Humanitarian conditions are at an all-time low. This is a time when the church around the world should be at the forefront, leading and effecting change, regardless of the cost. If the authors may give a personal note, Rami Ayad's life can be an inspiration to others as it has been for us, for he set an example in his own Christian mission of love for his own people as he endeavoured to share the Word of God with them. If this statement is less 'factual' and more of an expression of emotion, it is because of the frustrating impotence that we as Israeli Christians feel in being so close and yet so disconnected from our brothers and sisters in need.

### Israel and the Jewish People: Background

As background to the issue of religious freedom in Israel vis-à-vis Christian mission, we need to understand the perspectives of Judaism regarding the latter. Jewish-Christian relations have been an important item on scholarly as well as community agendas for a long time. The history is well-known. Ever since the first books on Jewish-Christian relations came into existence, i.e. the books eventually canonised as the New Testament, there have ensued a series of watershed developments and turning-points. From the gradual removal of believers in Jesus from the synagogues after the introduction of *birkat haminim* (the so-called 'Blessing on the Heretics') at the end of the first century,<sup>22</sup> to events such as the Crusades, the promulgation of the Blood Libel, the ghettoisation of Jewish people, restrictions on Jews as to vocation, to take just some examples, the story is one of discrimination and ultimately violence by Christians against Jewish people.<sup>23</sup> From Ambrose of Milan's justification of acts of anti-Semitism,<sup>24</sup> to the ethnic cleansing of the Spanish Inquisition, in the words of a common Christian liturgy of confession, 'We have sinned in thought, word and deed.'

---

<sup>22</sup> H.H. Ben-Sasson, *History of the Jews* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 325. Note that the *birkat haminim* is no longer considered by many scholars to be the singular watershed event it was once thought to be. Scholars now recognise that the 'parting of the ways' occurred more gradually than past scholarship recognised, not becoming final until perhaps the fourth century.

<sup>23</sup> The distinction between 'Jews' and 'Christians' is later than the first century, but developed during the 'parting of the ways' in the second to the fourth centuries. For convenience, we retain the distinction here in reference even to the earlier period.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1988), 164. Johnson, with many others, also includes Augustine as an example of anti-Jewish theology within the church: *History of the Jews*, 165. For a different view of Augustine, see Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

However, the Jewish people have committed sins against the church as well. By this we have in mind first of all the persecution of Jews who became followers of Jesus in the early church (the story of Stephen, and Paul's activities when he was known as Saul). At the other end of the chronological spectrum, Jews who came to faith in the nineteenth and even early twentieth centuries were often unable to find employment within the Jewish community, as they had previously been able to. (Nor were Christians free of suspicion of the motives of such believers; discrimination cut both ways.) Hence, the Jewish missions of the time found a need to develop institutions to train and employ Jewish converts.

Despite Judaism's desire to deny the existence, or at least the validity, of Jewish believers in Jesus throughout the centuries, in each generation there have nevertheless been Jewish people who have followed the example of the apostles and accepted the grace offered by their Jewish Messiah (as well as those who 'converted' out of fear for their lives, or in the period following the eighteenth-century Emancipation, for reasons of social advancement and acceptance).

For example, the Talmud records one such believer in Jesus called Jacob of Kefar Sekhaniah, reported as working miracles and healing in the name of Jesus.<sup>25</sup> Because a saying of Jesus reported by Jacob 'pleased' a certain Rabbi Eliezer, the latter was 'arrested for heresy'. Though Jewish people are not normally arrested for considering the Gospel, in reality not much has changed in the Jewish population in regards to the acceptance of Jews who choose to follow Jesus.

Despite community reaction, Jewish followers of Jesus have often been active in promulgating faith in Jesus. The activities of several Jewish Christian missionaries are historically noteworthy. Abner of Burgos was an ardent student of Judaism, yet chose to follow Jesus and write unceasingly in the hope that Jews would follow Jesus.<sup>26</sup> Friedrich Julius Stahl, though looked upon unfavourably by other Jews for having accepted Christ, continued to write as a lawyer and politician, concluding in his magnum opus<sup>27</sup> that all law should be based, not on rationalism, but on Christian revelation.

---

<sup>25</sup> See e.g. Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton, NJ; Oxford, UK: Princeton University Press, 2007), 42, 54, and the surrounding discussion.

<sup>26</sup> Shalom, Sadik. 'Abner of Burgos', *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014), Edward N. Zalta (ed): <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/abner-burgos/>. The article describes Abner as a critic of Aristotle, who by his time had heavily influenced Jewish philosophical and theological thought.

<sup>27</sup> *Die Philosophie des Rechts nach geschichtlicher Ansicht*. See the entry in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* of 1911: [www.theodora.com/encyclopedia/s2/friedrich\\_julius\\_stahl.html](http://www.theodora.com/encyclopedia/s2/friedrich_julius_stahl.html), where the title is given in English as 'An historical overview of the philosophy of law' and 'in which he bases all law and political science upon Christian revelation, denies rationalistic doctrines, and, as a deduction from this

However, in the view of some historians, even Jews who converted freely rather than from fear of persecution or execution were characterised by anti-Semitism. Historian H.H. Ben-Sasson writes concerning Jewish converts in the years following 1391: 'Some had indeed converted out of enthusiastic conviction, and their subsequent persecution of and missionary preaching to their fellow Jews helped to increase the bitterness towards all who became Christian.'<sup>28</sup> This quote is particularly relevant, as it does more than just reveal the animosity between two Bible-based faiths in the fourteenth century. It also shows how Ben-Sasson equates 'persecution' with 'missionary preaching' – a view that he is not alone in holding. Both authors have heard the accusation often voiced by Jewish people who oppose missionary work, namely, that a missionary is 'worse than Hitler'. As Hitler killed the Jewish body, it is suggested, missionaries are killing the Jewish soul.

Among historical prominent Jewish believers in Jesus, we can on the other hand name two who were looked upon in a *positive* light: Selig (Paulus) Cassel (1821–1892) and Daniel Chwolson (1819–1911). Their life and work led to increased understanding between the Jewish and Christian communities. Chwolson was able to demonstrate to the Russian government that the 'blood libel' accusation levelled against the Jews of Saratov in the nineteenth century was false.<sup>29</sup> Cassel was grudgingly given credit in the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* for opposing anti-Semitism.<sup>30</sup> These are the exceptions to the rule that Jewish people see belief in Jesus as a betrayal, and the work of evangelism as a form of persecution.

Indeed, for religious Judaism, believing in Jesus has almost always been tantamount to believing in another God, a form of idolatry. The conviction that Christianity is no different from paganism finds apparent confirmation when Jews are seen to enter churches in which one finds crosses, icons and other types of Christian imagery, which religious Jews often consider to be

---

principle, maintains that a state church must be strictly confessional'. See further Jeffrey T. Zalar, 'Up from Liberalism?' (May 2009): [www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=23076](http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=23076)

<sup>28</sup> Ben-Sasson, *History of the Jews*, 620.

<sup>29</sup> 'Chwolson, Daniel Abramovich', *Jewish Encyclopaedia*: <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4383-chwolson-daniel-abramovich>. The term 'blood libel' concerns the myth which began in mediæval times in East Anglia after the death of a Christian child. A local monk accused the Jews of his death which led to the rumour that Jews used the blood of Christian children to prepare for the Passover. This myth persists in some circles today.

<sup>30</sup> Cited in A. Bernstein, *Some Jewish Witnesses for Christ* (London: Operative Jewish Converts' Institution, 1909), 163: 'It was this manly action that gives us some satisfaction for his desertion of the parental religion.'

idolatrous in nature. (Ironically, some Jewish homes are filled with imagery, symbols and icon-like pictures of rabbis.<sup>31</sup>)

### The Modern State of Israel

This background lays the groundwork for understanding the situation in the modern State of Israel, established in 1948 following the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust. Israel's Declaration of Independence (which serves as the basis for its laws) grants freedom of religion, assembly and expression. The law allows for freedom of belief, and Christian mission is therefore permitted.

It is important to note that this does not mean that the Israeli population has been reached with the Gospel, or that this freedom is even understood by Israelis. Both authors have observed Jewish people in conversation with us about Jesus on the public streets of Israel, who have called the police to report a crime – only to discover that we were permitted to engage in evangelism. Some have argued with the police over such permission, clearly unaware of the nature of religious freedom in Israel.

The situation regarding religious freedom in Israel is complicated by several factors.

### *Disproportionate Influence of Orthodox Jews in Israel*

First, unlike in many other western nations, there is no separation of religion and state in Israel. Even secular Jews give authority over their own Jewish culture and identity to the rabbinate, which represents a minority religious view. Thus, in keeping with religious Jewish law, most shopping malls and supermarkets are closed on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath (*Shabbat*). Some laws forbid work on *Shabbat*, which means that even secular Jews can, for example, be fined if their shops remain open on that day.

This religious influence on Israeli laws stems from the fact that Israel is a multi-party parliamentary democracy. This means that the 120 seats in the parliament are occupied by some twenty different parties. This system gives more power to minority parties who join coalition governments. The result has been that much power is given to Orthodox Jews who, in return for their party's support of the government, receive a ministry position. In

---

<sup>31</sup> Note that Judaism does not consider Islam in the same way; there is not the same 'risk' in relating to Islam, nor is Islam considered to be idolatry. For example, a Jew can enter a mosque. However, according to response (rabbinic answers to questions), entering a church is forbidden in Orthodox Judaism, and debated in Conservative Judaism. See e.g. 'Entering Mosques and Churches': [www.responsafortoday.com/engsums/6\\_13.htm](http://www.responsafortoday.com/engsums/6_13.htm) (Conservative); 'Is a Jew Permitted to Enter a Mosque or Church in a Case of Great Need?': [www.halachayomit.co.il/EnglishDisplayRead.asp?readID=2367](http://www.halachayomit.co.il/EnglishDisplayRead.asp?readID=2367) (Orthodox).



particular, the Ministry of the Interior has been under the control of Orthodox Jewish parties which have used their position to enforce Jewish religious law on Israeli society. Thus, for example, even secular Jewish Israelis must go through rabbinical channels in order to get married or to be buried in a Jewish cemetery.

In keeping with the historic Jewish view of Christian missions outlined above, the rabbinical establishment in Israel maintains that one cannot be Jewish and believe in Jesus. It should be clear: for religious Jews in Israel, Jewish Christians and Messianic Jews are outside the Jewish camp.<sup>32</sup> Going even further, some extremist rabbis have ruled that Jews should not accept donations, money or volunteers from Christians.<sup>33</sup> One recent example comes from Hebron in the West Bank where, in 2011, 'Rav Lior reinforced his *psak* [ruling] for the Hebron community on not accepting evangelical funding.'<sup>34</sup>

For Christian mission and Messianic Jews in Israel, this has meant difficulty. There have been some incidents of violent persecution of the church in Israel by extremist Orthodox Jews. One notable example is an incident in which on 20th March 2008, a bomb was delivered in the guise of a present to the home of David and Leah Ortiz, pastors of a congregation in Ariel. Their then 15-year-old son Ami was severely injured.<sup>35</sup> The perpetrator was since identified as Jack Titel, an Orthodox Jew. A congregation in Arad in southern Israel has experienced persecution by members of an Orthodox Jewish sect, the *Gor Hasidim*. There, riots and harassment of Messianic Jews have become the norm, though recently persecution has decreased.<sup>36</sup> These two examples are extreme but they illustrate a point: persecution and anti-Christian actions are not sanctioned by the laws of the State of Israel or by the government. The law actually protects minority religions, yet it is sometimes easier for city and other government officials to look the other way, especially when it comes to Christian rights and beliefs.

---

<sup>32</sup> Yet the Orthodox Jewish position is that one is a Jew if one's mother is Jewish – that is, it is defined by matrilineal descent, not by faith. (Outside Israel, some branches of Judaism also accept patrilineal descent.) This presents a paradox in excluding Jews by birth who embrace faith in Jesus.

<sup>33</sup> See Committee of Binyamin Region Rabbis, 'A Document of Principles regarding acceptance of monetary and manpower assistance from Christian organizations or individuals' (October 2012). This and related documents can be found via the links at: <http://jewishisrael.ning.com/page/halachic-rulings-opinions-and>

<sup>34</sup> 'Rav Lior and Rav Gold address evangelical missionary crisis at Jewish Israel event in Hebron', Jewish Israel (18th September 2011): <http://jewishisrael.ning.com/profiles/blogs/rav-lior-and-rav-gold-address-evangelical-missionary-crisis-at-je>

<sup>35</sup> For the full story, see: [www.amiortiz.com/the-story](http://www.amiortiz.com/the-story)

<sup>36</sup> 'Persecution in Arad, Israel' (28th February 2011): <http://maozisraelblog.blogspot.co.il/2011/02/persecution-in-arad-israel.html>



### Additional Factors

While Orthodox influence has created issues for religious freedom in Israel, there are other reasons why such scenarios as the authors have described take place. The problem is not that there is a lack of freedom for Christian mission in Israel. Rather, the problem is *the near lack of any Christian mission in Israel*. With a paucity of continuous and publicly visible Christian missionary work, there is little opportunity to confront challenges to evangelism in the law courts and affirm the religious freedoms that are part of the democratic nature of Israel. In the ministry the authors serve with, Jews for Jesus, when we have challenged Israeli authorities about the legality of our Jewish evangelistic methodologies in Israel, our rights have been protected and upheld.

The lack of missions in Israel, not to mention the decline in Jewish missions elsewhere, is due to in part to *historical factors*. In the wake of the Holocaust, many segments of the worldwide church embraced the belief that it had lost the right to share the Gospel with Jewish people, whether in Israel or elsewhere. However, the church's loss of vision for Jewish evangelisation is not just a result of the historic horrors of the concentration camps. It is also a result of *theological* trends that find no theological significance in the Jewish people's return to the land of Israel, or in an ongoing and current role for the Jewish people in the plan of God. In addition, 'dual covenant' theology, according to which Jewish people have a separate salvific covenant with God such that they do not need God's saving grace offered through Jesus, has made inroads into the church at large.<sup>37</sup>

The lack of a Christian mission in Israel is reinforced by *misconceptions that Christians often hold* in regard to Jewish people, such as that Jewish people are well-versed in the Hebrew Bible (*Tanakh* or Old Testament). Yet a majority of Jewish people worldwide are secular, and Israel is no exception. In fact, while the situation is better outside Israel, within Israeli society virtually no Jewish people recognise the New Testament as a Jewish book, nor do they understand the Jewish background to the Christian faith.<sup>38</sup> The number of self-identified secular Jews in Israel varies according to the particular survey consulted or sub-groups in question.

Copyrighted Material

<sup>37</sup> Dual-covenant theology is often traced to the thinking of Franz Rosenzweig, an early twentieth-century Jewish philosopher and writer, especially in his book *The Star of Redemption*. For an overview of the relevant factors, see 'Jewish Evangelism: A Call to the Church' (Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 60; Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 2004). Available at: [www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-60](http://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-60).

<sup>38</sup> See Stephen Katz, 'A Survey of Israeli Knowledge and Attitudes toward Jesus', *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* 59 (2009), 6-16. Cf. Stephan Katz, 'The Applied Use of Survey Results in Evangelizing Jewish Israelis', *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* 59 (2009), 17-22.

Thus, according to one report,<sup>39</sup> 46% (or 43%)<sup>40</sup> of Israelis self-identified in 2009 as 'secular'. However, the same report indicated that, for immigrants from the former Soviet Union, the figure was 79%. Elsewhere, 51% of all Israeli Jews self-identified as 'secular' in 2008,<sup>41</sup> while a figure of 63% is given for Ashkenazic Jews from Europe or North America.<sup>42</sup> *Ynet* reported in 2007 that the secular sector was shrinking, citing a figure of 20% from the Israel Democracy Institute.<sup>43</sup> The widely varying figures should not obscure the fact that Orthodox Judaism remains a minority in Israel, nor that secular Jews, regardless of the exact percentage, comprise a vibrant and influential sector of Israeli society.<sup>44</sup>

In the light of the above factors, Israel is largely unreached with the Gospel; nevertheless, in the authors' own experience as missionaries, we find that the Jewish population in Israel today is the most open among the many Jewish communities of the world. Occurrences of persecution and hostility to the Christian mission in Israel actually broadcast and magnify the Gospel. For example, as a result of hostilities to the Jews for Jesus evangelistic campaigns in the greater Tel-Aviv region in May 2008, we were able to preach the Gospel on national television.<sup>45</sup> The broadcast was not a set-up or opportunity to ridicule us. It was an example of honestly curious yet wary secular Jews concerning the presence of Jews who believed in Jesus. The fact that such a broadcast took place illustrates the freedom of belief that is enjoyed in Israel, even though it is not always upheld consistently, as discussed above.

## Conclusion

While this chapter has not been exhaustive, the authors believe they have fairly portrayed the nature of freedom of belief and Christian mission in Israel-Palestine today. Events in this part of the world are complex and in continual flux. Continual research and monitoring is needed to keep abreast of the issues we have discussed. In the midst of the turmoil of this region,

<sup>39</sup> Israel Democracy Institute, 'A Portrait of Israeli Jews: Beliefs, Observance, and Values of Israeli Jews, 2009' (Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute Publications; Jerusalem: AVI-CHAI Israel, 2009), 30, 99.

<sup>40</sup> There was a conflict between the data on pages 30 and 99.

<sup>41</sup> Asher Arian, Raphael Ventura, and Michael Philippov, 'Israeli Secularism in the Guttman Center Polls 1990-2008': <http://en.idi.org.il/analysis/articles/israeli-secularism-in-the-guttman-center-polls-1990-2008>

<sup>42</sup> Arian, Ventura, and Philippov, 'Israeli Secularism'.

<sup>43</sup> Kobi Nahshoni, 'Secular sector shrinking, study shows': *ynetnews.com* (24th November 2007), at: [www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3474605,00.html](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3474605,00.html). *Ynetnews* is the online English-language Israeli news website of Yedioth Abronoth, Israel's most-read newspaper, and the Hebrew news portal, *Ynet*.

<sup>44</sup> The problem is compounded in that Jews who self-identify as traditional are likely referring to *behaviour*, not necessarily *belief*.

<sup>45</sup> See: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKzZgNlh4sM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKzZgNlh4sM)

we remember that Jesus said: 'Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'<sup>46</sup> We are convinced that our brothers and sisters in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip are so blessed, and in need of our support and prayers.

In the ultimate sense, our freedom does not come from human authority but it is a gift from God. 'For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.'<sup>47</sup> No matter what our situation, we cannot redefine the word *freedom* as it pleases us.

We therefore call on the church to pray for Israel-Palestine, and for the salvation of Arabs, Palestinians, Orthodox Jews, devout Muslims, secular Jews, and all who live in this volatile region.

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

Copyrighted Material

---

<sup>46</sup> Matt. 5:10.

<sup>47</sup> Rom. 8:20-21.

# THE DECLINE OF ANCIENT NORTH AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY THROUGH THE IMPACT OF ISLAM

Bernd Brandl

## Introduction

Today, churches are challenged through growing communities of Muslim immigrants in Europe. Simultaneously, churches shrink because of demographic changes within the European population. What will happen when churches mutate to religious minorities? How will the rise of Islam in Europe change the former Christian continent?

It might be helpful to take a glance at the history of churches which had to face similar processes. What helped or hindered churches to survive during the ongoing Islamic sovereignty over them?

Is there something to learn for European churches?

An example might be the fate of ancient North African Christianity. This was the church of famous theologians such as Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine. They shaped the theology of the western church. But this church faded away only four centuries after the conquest of Islam in the eighth century. The last knowledge about an African bishop (in the city of Bougie, today Bejaia) reached Rome in the year 1159.<sup>1</sup> No further news of an indigenous North African church reached the shores of Christian Europe.

How could this decline of churches in North Africa happen?

## The Rise of the North African Church in the First Centuries AC

### *The Geographic Area*

Speaking of the North African church, the term 'North Africa' is vague and lacks a solid description. In francophone literature, the countries along the Atlas Mountains are called 'Afrique du Nord'. Other scholars define North Africa as the whole area from Egypt to Morocco, including the Sahara desert. Not included are the countries south of the Sahara – for example, Senegal and Niger.<sup>2</sup> I concentrate on that area, in which the ancient church

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Algeria: the birth, death and resurrection of a Church', *Barnabas Aid*, (September-October 2006), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Horst G. Mensching, 'Nordafrika', in *Nordafrika und Vorderasien* (Fischer Länderkunde, Vol. 4: Frankfurt: Fischer, 1989), 72.

developed, except Egypt. This happened mainly in the northern coastal seashore of Africa, which was conquered by the Romans around 100 BC.

In Muslim publications, this area is called *Maghreb*. In Arabic *Maghreb* means *the West*. The connotation is: The land, where the sun is setting. The remote west in this sense is Morocco. The people groups, which lived in this area, were Berbers, mostly nomadic people.

### *Short History of North Africa in the Pre-Christian Epoch*

Around 800 BC, the Phoenicians (Punic) Semitic sea explorers founded a commercial centre in North Africa, called Carthage. Today, the ruins of Carthage are found near Tunis. Carthage became the capital of the Punic Empire, which ruled over the Mediterranean Sea. Along the coast the Phoenicians colonised land and founded cities.

The Romans defeated them and destroyed Carthage in 146 BC. In 44 BC they rebuilt Carthage as a Roman colony. Beside Alexandria, Carthage became the wealthiest seaport and a commercial centre in the Roman Empire with around 100,000 inhabitants. It was the capital of the province Africa Proconsularis. The Romans established two more provinces in North Africa: Numidia (today the north-east of Algeria) and Mauretania Caesariensis (the western parts of Algeria and the east of Morocco).<sup>3</sup> Mostly members of the Latin upper class immigrated to North Africa. Their homeland remained Italy. They settled in the cities and on big land sites in the provinces. In the eyes of this Latin upper class, North Africa was more an Italian colony than an independent province. They had a lifestyle which was similar to Romans in Italy and their language remained Latin.

North Africa became the wheat belt of Rome. There were large agricultural estates; they produced olive oil, wheat and vine for Rome.<sup>4</sup>

Three people groups made up the population of the Roman provinces of North Africa. First, Latin immigrants lived in the cities; but in the urban centres there remained still a large number of the Punic population.<sup>5</sup> Outside the cities there existed a great amount of Berber population. They formed the lower class of society; settled parts of them worked on Roman estates. They were partly Latinised and assimilated to the Romans. The inlands of North Africa remained in the hands of free and independent nomadic Berber clans. The population of the Roman provinces was

<sup>3</sup> A good summary of the Roman North Africa can be found in Gilbert Charles-Picard, *Nordafrika und die Römer* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1962); also Ch.-Andre Julien, *Histoire de l'Afrique du Nord. Tunisie-Algerie-Maroc* (Paris: Payot, 1952), and his *Etudes maghrebines* (Paris: Payot, 1968).

<sup>4</sup> Herbert A.V. Beerens, 'Christianity and Islam in North Africa and Egypt: A Historical and Missiological Evaluation', unpublished (Leuven: 1988), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Shaw, *The Kingdom of God in Africa. A short History of African Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 41.

therefore mixed in diverse people groups which differed in social, ethnic and cultural terms.

### *The Early Period of the Church*

Nobody knows when the first church was planted in North Africa. The western parts of Egypt, the city of Cyrene and the Roman province of Cyrenaica are mentioned in the NT four times. Simon of Cyrene, who carried the cross of Jesus, became a Christian (Mark 15:21 & Rom. 16:13). At Pentecost, Jews from Cyrene were among those who heard Peter and later became members of the church in Antioch (Acts 2:20; 11:20 & 13:1). So it is possible that the Gospel was brought to North Africa via Cyrene.<sup>6</sup> Another assumption is that Christianity arrived in Carthage through the sea trade between Rome and Africa. According to Augustine, the Gospel came from all regions around the Mediterranean world to Africa.<sup>7</sup>

In 180 AC, the church of North Africa is mentioned for the first time. Seven men and five women were killed because of their faith in Christ.<sup>8</sup> Tertullian (160-220 AC)<sup>9</sup> mentioned Christian congregations in Carthage and in five other cities.<sup>10</sup> Christian life was harassed through persecution. In 201 AC, Caesar Severus forbade conversions to Christ. The account of the martyrdom of the noble lady Vibia Perpetua and her slave Felicitas in Carthage is one of the most authentic testimonies of African Christians' willingness to suffer for Christ.<sup>11</sup> Through this story of the martyrs as well as the scriptures of Tertullian, we see some characteristics of early North African Christianity:

1. The origins of the first Christians lay mainly in Italy. Sometimes one can find a name with Punic background among the martyrs but most of them had Latin roots. In Africa, the first Christian Latin literature was developed. Tertullian used Latin and created a literature of a

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Neill, *Geschichte der christlichen Mission* (Erlangen: Ev.-luth. Verlag, 1974), 29.

<sup>7</sup> Eberhard Troeger, 'Kirche und Mission in Nordafrika', delivered in Bonn at the Deutsch-Maghrebinische Gesellschaft, 24th April 2007, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Rudolf Knopf and G. Krüger (eds), *Ausgewählte Märtyrerakten* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1965, SQS NF 3, 28-29); Adolf von Harnack, *Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (Vols. 1-2), (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs,<sup>3</sup> 1924), 891-92.

<sup>9</sup> Jochen Eber, *Tertullian. 'Gott ist gut und groß'. Tertullians Spiritualität in Lehre und Leben* (Bettingen, Germany: Winteler, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Quintus Septimius F. Tertullian, *Apologeticum: Verteidigung des Christentums*, (München: Kösel,<sup>3</sup> 1984), 1.

<sup>11</sup> Ruth A. Tucker, *Bis an das Ende der Erde. Missionsgeschichte in Biographien* (Metzingen: Franz, 1996), 24-26.

high linguistic level. He formed terms which became key phrases in Roman Catholic theology.<sup>12</sup>

Christianity in North Africa grew mainly in the cities. Latourette assumed that, among the Latin-speaking immigrants, Christianity was wider spread than among other parts of the population. Latin Christians belonged to the upper class; they were the leading group but remained a minority.<sup>13</sup> The Punic population was only partly reached with the Gospel. A few bishops had Punic names and rare Christian-Punic literature was produced. Most of the Berbers remained untouched by the Gospel. There existed no Bible translation into the Berber idiom. Only when Latinised did Berbers and Phoenicians open themselves to the Gospel. In churches, priests preached mostly in Latin.<sup>14</sup>

2. Tertullian taught a Christian ethical rigorism. His opposition to the Roman Empire was radical – and radicalism remained one of the outstanding features of the African church. A lifestyle with high ethical standards was practised. For example, African Christians used a daily prayer time rhythm which is common today only in monasteries.<sup>15</sup> In Egypt, radicalism could survive within the church through the monastic movement. This option was not popular in the North African church; only a few monasteries existed there.<sup>16</sup> Here radical Christianity was practised within local congregations.
3. Another element of the African church should be noted: worship services for Christians were celebrated mostly in the houses of local bishops. This church preserved an older state of hierarchy concerning the office of bishops. What was seen as a bishop's seat in Africa was understood in other parts of the church as a parish of a local priest. Bishops resided in important cities and ruled over many local churches. In North Africa – even in the fifth, sixth and seventh

<sup>12</sup> “Die lateinische Sprache hat ihm [Tertullian], wie es scheint, tausend christliche Wörter zu verdanken”, Henri Tessier, ‘Die afrikanischen Wurzeln des lateinischen Christentums, in 30 Tage in Kirche und Welt’, *Internationale Monatszeitschrift* (March 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Latourette, *History of the Expansion of Christianity*, Vol 1, 93.

<sup>14</sup> In some areas it was necessary for the priests to know some Punic; in spite of that, Latin remained the language of the liturgy (Neill, *Geschichte*, 30).

<sup>15</sup> Troeger, ‘Kirche und Mission’, 1.

<sup>16</sup> After Augustine was consecrated to be bishop in Hippo Regio, he founded a monastery. There existed some others, but they played no important role in the history of this church; I found no monasteries marked on the map of this church; Hubert Jedin, Kenneth Scott Latourette and Jochen Martin (eds), *Atlas zur Kirchengeschichte* (Freiburg/Basel/Rom/Wien: Herder, 1987), 7-24. During the troubles by the Vandals in the fifth and sixth centuries, North Africa was cut off from the development of the Benedict western monastery movement which started at that time. Armin Sierszyn, *2000 Jahre Kirchengeschichte. Von den Anfängen bis zum Untergang des Weströmischen Reiches* (four vols, Vol. 1, Holzgerlingen: Hänssler, 2000), 295.

centuries – many bishops ruled over smaller villages and cities. At its high-water mark, this church had more than 300 bishops' seats.<sup>17</sup> This phenomenon illustrates that local hierarchy was important for the church, although in the fifth century the bishop's seat in Carthage was raised up to be one of the five metropolitan centres. The bishop of Carthage also received the right to call and lead the African general synod. The disastrous split of the African church during the Donatist controversy can be traced back to the numerous local bishops, who all tried to command, speak and act in church affairs.

### The North African Church from the Third to the Fifth Century

Two men deeply influenced the church in North Africa after Tertullian: Cyprian and Augustine. At the same time, the Donatist schism pushed church leaders to fight for the true character of the body of Christ.

#### *Cyprian of Carthage*

Tacitus Căcilius Cyprian (200-258) is the second most famous Church Father who belonged to the African church. He was elected to be bishop of Carthage in 248 AC. During his time the Christians had to endure severe persecution. In 250 AC, emperor Decius oppressed the church within the empire. Many Christians became confessors and martyrs but others denied their faith. Even clerics and bishops were among the so-called *lapsi* (traitors). When the persecution ended, Cyprian had to resolve a difficult issue: most of the *lapsi* tried to come back into the church, but how should Cyprian handle this? Should the church incorporate the *lapsi* as soon as possible or keep the ideal of purity and close the doors? At two synods held in Carthage, Cyprian solved the problem: after some time of repentance *lapsi* were welcomed back into the congregations, even clerics or bishops. But they were excluded from any further ministry. Sacraments, when administered by such clerics, were regarded as invalid; this became a matter of dispute between Cyprian and the Roman bishop Stephan. Roman praxis was to acknowledge even the baptism of a sectarian. The North African church demanded that converts from a schismatic church be baptised again.<sup>18</sup> Cyprian was in agreement with Tertullian who required the holiness of the whole church. Cyprian demanded holiness at least for the clergy. In his eyes, the church was holy because it was ruled by holy human beings.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Troeger, 'Kirche und Mission', 1; Neill, *Geschichte*, 30.

<sup>18</sup> Sierszyn, *2000 Jahre Kirchengeschichte*, 165.

<sup>19</sup> W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 408-09.



### *The North African Church in the Fourth and Fifth Century*

Christians experienced peace for forty years after the death of Cyprian. But then in the years 303 to 313 a last persecution met the church. Afterwards a schism broke out within the African church. Unfortunately this split remained until the times of the Arab invasion. The church leaders failed in their responsibility to heal this wound.

The persecution caused many Christians to become martyrs; others were weak and became traitors. They delivered the Holy Scriptures to the authorities. To understand what now happened it is important to know that, long before within the church of Carthage, moderate clerics and rigorists from Numidia fought against each other. This conflict was also caused by social and cultural differences. The clergy in Carthage had close connections with the leading Latin upper class; in Numidia the clergy was taken from the lower class population and probably also from ethnic non-Latin people.<sup>20</sup>

Many martyrs came from the poorer segments of Carthage citizens. In jail, waiting for execution, they preached to visitors. The clergy fought against this praxis of ruling the church through martyrs. They feared that the authority of the hierarchy would be damaged by the martyrs.

Conflict broke out after the death of the bishop Mensurius. Archdeacon Cäcilian Cyprian was hastily consecrated as new bishop of Carthage without contact with the bishop in Numidia. This took place with the help of a neighbourhood bishop named Felix of Aptunga. They ignored the custom which authorised the oldest bishop of Numidia to consecrate the bishop of Carthage. In the meantime, the Numidian bishop Donatus travelled to Carthage. At a synod with 70 bishops he consecrated another man as bishop, the lector Majorinus.<sup>21</sup> He belonged to the rigorist opposition within the church. Soon after his consecration, Majorinus died and Donatus, the true head of the opposition, was elected bishop of Carthage.<sup>22</sup>

Donatus had a high reputation; he was a charismatic leader and strict in what he believed was right. He accused Felix of Aptunga of being a *traditor* who had delivered the Holy Scriptures to the Roman authorities during the persecution. This incident Donatus regarded as a mortal sin, and in his eyes the activities of Felix as bishop were invalid.

To solve this issue, a synod was held in Rome in 313 AC. During the synod the Donatists could not verify their accusations against Felix of

<sup>20</sup> Beerens, 'Christianity', 5.

<sup>21</sup> Otto Scheel, 'Donatismus', <sup>1</sup>*RGG* (nine vols, Vol. 2, Tübingen: Mohr, 1910), 121; Bernhard Kriegbaum, 'Donatismus', <sup>4</sup>*RGG* (five vols, Vol. 2, Tübingen: Mohr, 1999), 939; W.H.C. Frend, 'Donatismus', *Reallexikon f. Antike u. Christentum* (25 vols, Vol. 4, Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1959), 128-47.

<sup>22</sup> Sierszyn, *2000 Jahre Kirchengeschichte*, 213-15; Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa from antiquity to the present* (London: SCPK, 1995), 36-39.

Aptunga. On the other hand, the enemies of the Donatists turned the case and accused Donatus; he had consecrated bishops who were traitors. Donatus was excommunicated by the church.<sup>23</sup> In the meantime, the situation of the empire changed rapidly. Constantine needed a united church; the schism in North Africa became a priority for imperial politics. From 316 till 321, Constantine tried to reunify the church, in the end through military force. But all pressure caused only more resistance among the Donatists. Now the conflict was mixed with national and social revolutionary motives.<sup>24</sup> The remaining Catholic clergy came to depend on the state and the church in Rome. The split between the Donatists and the Catholic church deepened in the next centuries. Donatus saw himself as a true metropolitan of North Africa because 300 bishops stood on his side. This was the majority of the church leaders. It might be that the Donatists won some settled Berber tribes for the Gospel. For example, the Donatist bishop Optatus worked together with the Berber leader Gildo who was the head of the Roman legions in North Africa and the true ruler during this epoch.<sup>25</sup> But then the Donatists were weakened through infighting. It was disastrous for them when in 398 Gildo rebelled against Rome and a crushing defeat ended his life. In the next thirty years the Donatists lost influence.<sup>26</sup>

### Augustine

This was the situation when Augustine (354-430) influenced the future. He was born in Thargaste, a town in Numidia. After his conversion, Augustine returned to Africa. In 395 AC he was consecrated as bishop of Hippo Regio. As a member of the Catholic clergy, he tried to solve the split within his church. In 411 it was because of his efforts that 286 Catholic and 284 Donatist bishops formed a synod in order to solve the problem. But it was clear that only the Catholic church should be restored as the true body of Christ.<sup>27</sup> After the synod, the laws for heretics were used on the Donatists. Tertullian demanded holiness for all Christians; Cyprian demanded holiness only for the clergy; Augustine argued that the church itself as an institution was holy; i.e. the sacraments were always effective, regardless of the subjective holiness of the priest. The church will acknowledge even the

Copyrighted Material

<sup>23</sup> Sierszyn, *2000 Jahre Kirchengeschichte*, 215.

<sup>24</sup> The so called 'Circumcellionen' (wandering priests) fought with arms against the Romans; their followers were poor land workers, farmers, slaves and Berbers. They sought death as martyrs and the Donatists worshipped them (Sierszyn, *2000 Jahre Kirchengeschichte*, 216-17; Beerens, 'Christianity and Islam', 6; also Frend, 'Donatismus', RAC, 135-36).

<sup>25</sup> Beerens, 'Christianity', 6.

<sup>26</sup> Beerens, 'Christianity', 7.

<sup>27</sup> Beerens, 'Christianity', 7; Kurt Aland, *Geschichte der Christenheit* (Vol. 1, Gütersloh: Mohn, 1980), 168.

baptism of a heretic. With this ecclesiology, Augustine helped the Catholic church to justify their position as state church.<sup>28</sup> But his arguments contradicted the older African tradition.

The split within the church lasted more than 100 years and caused weakness to both sides. Other churches evangelised the world while in North Africa the Christians fought against each other. In 411 the Romans started harsh measures against the Donatists. Their Sunday services were forbidden and church buildings confiscated; the Donatist church structure was destroyed. But the invasion of the Vandals in 429-430 disrupted all further measures against the Donatists. From that time, the historical sources become vague and rare. We know that the Donatists in Numidia and Mauritania still existed after the invasion of the Vandals in the fifth century. They continued even after the offensive of the Arabs<sup>29</sup> in the second half of the seventh century. Then no further news has reached us concerning their fate.

### **The North African Church under the Vandals (429-533) and the Byzantine Rulers (533-642)**

The Vandals, Germanic people of more than 80,000 individuals, crossed the sea under their king Gaiseric in 429 AC. They conquered the Roman provinces of North Africa and settled there permanently. The Vandals founded a Germanic kingdom on the remains of the Roman provinces. Southern areas were now ruled by local Berber tribes.

Wulfila founded the first Germanic church among the Goths; by accident this church was shaped dogmatically Aryan; this faith was transferred to other Germanic peoples, one of them being the Vandals. In North Africa the result of this was disastrous. Suddenly three different churches existed side-by-side and each one was the enemy of the other and fought for domination over its rivals. Gaiseric immediately persecuted the Catholic church.<sup>30</sup> Its property was taken over by the Arians; in 437 the Catholic bishop of Carthage was sent into exile, and soon an Arian bishop ruled in Carthage. But the attempt to convert the Christians of North Africa to Arianism failed. This deepened the hatred between the religious groups. From the beginning the splits within the population of the Vandal kingdom weakened this territory. One of the successors of Gaiseric, Hunnerich (477-484), worked out an extreme anti-Catholic church policy. Believers who stood in opposition to Arianism were excluded from properties and banned to Sicily or Sardinia.<sup>31</sup> Churches were changed into Arian

<sup>28</sup> Bernd Moeller, *Geschichte des Christentums in Grundzügen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 2000), 109.

<sup>29</sup> Beerens, 'Christianity', 8.

<sup>30</sup> Beerens, 'Christianity', 8.

<sup>31</sup> Beerens, 'Christianity', 8; Tröger, 'Kirche und Mission', 3.

congregations and believers were forced to accept the Arian faith. But Hunnerich failed in his attempt to destroy the Catholic church. His successors changed the policy towards the Catholics; they stopped the persecution. The monk Fulgentius (c 462-527) helped to restore the destroyed Catholic church structures and he was allowed to hold theological discussions with the King Thrasamund. His successor Hilderich allowed religious freedom for the Catholic church in North Africa because of the influence of Fulgentius.<sup>32</sup>

But the end of the Vandal kingdom was near. The Vandals were too weak to have a lasting impact on North Africa. In 533 the Byzantine emperor Justinian defeated the Vandals and they faded away among the mixed population of North Africa.<sup>33</sup> The only lasting influence of the Vandals was this: They permanently weakened the Catholic as well as the Donatist church. There was another result of the Vandal kingdom: on its edges in the south, free Berber tribes organised a confederation which lasted even into the times of the Arab invasion. The majority of these Berbers were never reached with the Gospel, although there existed in the west of Numidia and Mauritania small Berber kingdoms which confessed to being Christian. They used Latin as their official language.<sup>34</sup> I assume that, within these kingdoms, some Donatists survived. But it shows also that native Berber tribes only came into contact with Christianity when they opened themselves to Latin culture and became settled. Berbers who remained in their traditional culture (nomadic or semi-nomadic) were never reached by the church which was strong only in the cities of the coastal area. This phenomenon one can detect many times in mission history. Pastoral and nomadic cultures have often maintained their traditional lifestyle. The North African church, either Catholic or Donatist, reached only those parts of the population who were Romanised and Latinised. The church could win the Punic people in the cities but it developed no Punic literature; the Christians assumed that Phoenicians who became Christians would become culturally Latin.<sup>35</sup>

The recovery of North Africa by the Byzantine emperor Justinian was part of his plan to restore the old Roman Empire. But his forces needed twenty years to defeat the rebellious Berbers in the south. The Berber confederation continued a little longer. At the end of the seventh century,

Copyrighted Material

<sup>32</sup> Shaw, *The Kingdom of God*, 55-56.

<sup>33</sup> Shaw, *The Kingdom of God*, 56. There exist some lasting traces of the Vandals, who mixed with other populations: today you can find indigenous people in North Africa with blond hair and some clans have names like Beni Jerman or Beni Fraoucen (Alain Brissaud, *Islam und Christentum*, Berlin: edition q, 1993), 156.

<sup>34</sup> Isichei, *A History of Christianity*, 42.

<sup>35</sup> Augustine used a translator when he preached on the country side. The people used *lingua punica*, the language of the Phoenicians (Isichei, *A History of Christianity*), 38.

when Roman power was broken by the Muslim invasion, only the Berbers resisted the Arabs successfully.<sup>36</sup>

Under Byzantine power, the Catholic church was restored and received back its old privileges. A synod was held in 534 AC; 220 bishops attended this meeting. This synod shows us that there still were a large number of bishops' seats. All other Christian churches were now banned. But in North Africa the religious laws of Justinian could not dominate the church. In Numidia a tolerated Donatist church continued. The African church was close to the western Catholic church and its dogmatic assumptions. Under the emperor Heraklius (610-641) the church gained new power. The Aruba Berbers formed a confederation and were converted to Christianity.<sup>37</sup> But within the church no outstanding person was found who could compete with the old African Church Fathers. In Africa the church depended totally on Italy in order to receive new spiritual input.<sup>38</sup>

The Byzantine Empire in the west and south broke down because of the dogmatic quarrels between the Monophysite churches in Syria and Egypt and the Orthodox Church. Byzantine military oppressed the churches and tried to indoctrinate the 'orthodox faith'. It is a tragedy that the churches in Syria and Egypt opened their cities to the Islamic army, because they thought: better under Islamic rule than under the hated Byzantine emperor.<sup>39</sup>

### **The Islamic Invasion of North Africa**

In 640-646 AC Islamic forces conquered Egypt. Refugees from Egypt and Syria came to North Africa. The North African church held strongly to the creed of Chalcedon (451 AC) which confessed two natures within Christ. They therefore rejected attempts of the Byzantines to compromise with the Monophysite churches. These conflicts within the Byzantine Empire weakened the military situation in North Africa at the beginning of the Islamic invasion. Instead of concentrating all their strength against the danger of Islam, Christians fought each other because of dogmatic differences. In Carthage, people started to secede from the Byzantine Empire. Gregor, the exarch of North Africa, rebelled against the emperor and was acclaimed in Carthage as new Imperator. But in 647, before the Byzantine powers reacted to this provocation the Arabs killed Gregor during one of their robbery raids from Egypt.<sup>40</sup> Only a small coastal strip of

<sup>36</sup> Beerens, 'Christianity', 9.

<sup>37</sup> Beerens, 'Christianity', 10.

<sup>38</sup> Latourette, *A History of the Expansion*, Vol. 2, 230-31.

<sup>39</sup> Isichei, *A History of Christianity*, 42-43; Neill, *Geschichte*, 47.

<sup>40</sup> The following information I obtained mainly from Beerens, 'Christianity', 11, 31ff. There is a lack of solid evidence about the Arab invasion of North Africa. Arab historians wrote their history of Africa 200 years after the event. There are no sources from Christians. Ibn Chaldun (1332-1406), who came from Tunis, reported

the former Roman provinces, together with some single coastal cities, remained under Byzantine control. For half a century they continued to rule over this part of Africa while the Arabs had already penetrated the inland with attacks and plundering. Between 660 and 663 the Egyptian governor Amr ibn Al-As invaded, plundered and destroyed North Africa several times. In 658 the Arabs damaged the flotilla of the Byzantines. Therefore the coastal cities of North Africa could not be protected any longer by Constantinople.

In 670 Uqba (or Ukba) started military hostilities against the Byzantine province of Proconsularis. Uqba founded an Arab settlement around 150 km south of Carthage and named it Kairawan (or Kairouan) as a sign that Arabs had tried to settle in North Africa.<sup>41</sup> But the Byzantines were not the strongest enemies of the Arab forces. They faced more powerful resistance from the Berbers. In two campaigns, in which Uqba led his troops to Morocco and the Atlantic coast (670 and 680-683), he fought against the Berbers and carried out a massacre among them. The great Berber leader Kosaila (or Kasila), together with Byzantine powers, overwhelmed Uqba in 683 and they pushed the Arabs back – but only for a short time. In 686 Kosaila was finally besieged by the Arabs. They returned to Kairawan. But still there was resistance, and the fight continued with the Jerawa Berbers in the Auras Mountains. The leader of these Berbers was a princess called Al-Kahina (or Karina). Some legendary sources named her a prophetess, some tell us that she was a Jewish Queen, others call her a Berber Princess. One source from the eleventh century tells us that she was a Christian. In 688 she was murdered. The Arabs never overwhelmed her, but at the end of her life it is said that she told her sons to merge with the Arabs.<sup>42</sup> In 698 Carthage fell without any resistance into the hands of the Arabs. Most of the Christian citizens had already fled to Italy.<sup>43</sup> A new capital named Tunis was founded. In 705-711 the Arabs completed their conquest of North Africa. Their new ruler Mussa Ibn Nusair used a hard policy of Islamisation against the oppressed peoples. But the possibility of gaining equality with Arabs when becoming a soldier within the Muslim army encouraged Berbers to become Muslim. Culturally, there were many similarities between Arab Bedouins and nomadic Berbers. This made it easier for a Berber to become a Muslim than to become a Christian. Becoming Christian meant that the Berbers had to settle and to Romanise themselves. The Arabisation of the Berbers was a consequence of the cultural

---

at his time about the invasion. Since 650 only very few documents from North Africa have reached Europe.

<sup>41</sup> Beerens, 'Christianity', 4.

<sup>42</sup> Beerens, 'Christianity', 33; Isichei, *A history of Christianity*, 43; M. Brett, 'The Arab Conquest and the Rise of Islam in North Africa', *The Cambridge History of Africa*, C.D. Clark, J.D. Fage and Roland Oliver (eds), (Vols 1-8. Vol. 2, Cambridge: CUP, 1975-1986), 509.

<sup>43</sup> Beerens, 'Christianity', 33.

similarities of Berbers and Arabs as desert people. The Berbers were the biggest part of the population in North Africa; when they converted to Islam, the remaining Christians became a hopeless minority.<sup>44</sup>

### The Decline of the North African Church

Isichei remarked in her church history: 'The extinction of Christianity in the Maghrib is one of the great mysteries of African history.'<sup>45</sup> A dark curtain fell over the Christians after the Muslim invasion. Our knowledge about what happened after these events is fragmentary. There exist only rare documents, which give evidence that a church continued after the Arab invasion. We know that the number of bishops' seats continually decreased. Pope Adrian (772-775) spoke about a living church in Africa. There resided still an archbishop in Carthage, where the bones of Cyprian lay. In 807 the relics of the famous Church Father could be brought to Italy. In the ninth century, news from African Christians reached Rome. Pope Benedict VII (974-983) received a letter written by Christian citizens and priests from Carthage. In 986 there remained only one Christian congregation in Tlemcen with a church building, while another church still existed in Ouargla/Algeria. In 1073-1076 Pope Gregor VII wrote three letters to an archbishop of Ipona in North Africa. In the meantime, many Christians in the few churches of North Africa were former slaves who were captured and brought to Africa. Only five bishops' seats remained at that time in North Africa. Twenty years later two continued, one in Bougie (Bejaia). When, in 1159, Abd al-Mumin conquered Tunis, he sent the local bishop into exile and forced the remaining Christians to become Muslim or die. Some Christians could flee, but most of them died. With this event, the last Christian witness of the old African church in Algeria vanished. Up to the twelfth century Arab authors mentioned so-called Afariqa whom they distinguished from the Berbers. It could be that these were remaining Christians. In 1246 authors talk about a bishop in Morocco. In the fourteenth century, Ibn Chaldun reported that in two villages in south Tunisia, near Gafsa, people still communicated in Latin. It could be that in this village people were old Latin-speaking Christians. This is probably the last information about the ancient North African church.

How could it happen that within three centuries the church of Augustine and Cyprian died out – with some few exceptions? The new Islamic leaders didn't wipe out the church immediately. Christians became second-class people, called *dhimmīs*. They had to pay head taxes to the Muslim state. Gradually, Christians were discriminated; they had no permission to construct church buildings, while mission among Muslims was strongly prohibited. Christian women who married a Muslim, lost their children to

<sup>44</sup> Isichei, *A History of Christianity*, 43.

<sup>45</sup> Isichei, *A History of Christianity*, 43.



Islam. But the example of other old Oriental churches shows us that it was possible to survive. The history of the North African church is different. The following could help us understand why the church died out:

1. The North African church became weak through centuries of inner quarrels and splits.

A Christianity, which is split into fighting fractions, cannot exist against a challenge like Islam.

2. The North African church was mainly the religion of the upper class which had migrated from Italy. Christians lived mostly in the Roman cities on the coast. Here Christianity was strong, but weak in the countryside. The church failed to evangelise the indigenous population, namely the Phoenicians and the Berbers. Conversions to Christianity always involved adaptation to Romanisation. No Punic or Berber literature was created. Only the settled population was reached by the Christians – the nomad Berbers remained outsiders. This was a great difference from the Coptic Church in Egypt. Here Christianity was soon indigenised.

A church which is not rooted in the culture of a people group has no future; it remains foreign to the people. A church which fails to be missionary remains unfruitful and will lose strength.

3. During and after the Islamic invasion, thousands of Christians fled to Italy, Spain and Greece.<sup>46</sup> Especially the Christian elite, often with Roman-Italian roots, fled back home. This brain drain is one of the reasons why we do not have written testimonies from the African church dating from the end of the eighth century. A rapid decline of spiritual and intellectual strength took place.<sup>47</sup> Only members of the lower intellectual and economic sections of the population remained in Africa.

Today many Oriental churches are also confronted with an exodus of Christians because of persecution and discrimination. Within Islamic societies there is an enormous pressure on Christians, which has caused members of the Christian elite especially to emigrate. A church without a theological and intellectual elite has no opportunity to argue against Islamic polemic and self-esteem.

4. Although Augustine founded the first monastery in North Africa, the monastic movement remained weak in the church. One reason for this might be that the Donatists monopolised the ascetic potential in their fight for a pure church. In Islamic times, the African church lacked monasteries as places where Christians could find refuge and gain new spiritual power. In Egypt, the monasteries helped the church to survive.

---

<sup>46</sup> The Muslim authorities had to hire workers from Egypt to work for them in the coastal cities – there was a lack of indigenous population: they had all gone (Brissaud, *Islam und Christentum*, 158).

<sup>47</sup> Troeger, 'Kirche und Mission in Nordafrika', 4.



Life in regulated communities helps churches to develop powers of resistance against Islamic pressure.

5. Another reason for the extinction of the North African church can be found in the special history of the Islamic Maghreb. The Coptic Church continued under the rule of the Umayyad; they treated them relatively peacefully. In North Africa times were not peaceful: one Islamic warlord followed another. North Africa became a place where Islamic radicals and Shi'ites looked for refuge.

One group, which was a result of the fight around Ali and the successors of Muhammad, the Charidjites, murdered Ali and escaped to North Africa. Shaw called them the 'militant puritans of the Islam.'<sup>48</sup> With their radical ideals, they were the natural partners of the Berbers. There were also similarities with the radical ideals of the Donatists. This might be one reason why the Berbers merged with them. The Charidjites accepted the Berbers as equals when they became Muslim because they believed that non-Arabs should also be able to attain the position of a caliph.<sup>49</sup>

Another Berber tribe, the Kotama, enemies to their Arab conquerors, welcomed the arrival in North Africa of the Shi'ite Persian Abu Abd Allah. He called himself the new caliph who would rule the world. Together with the Berbers, he conquered North Africa and founded a Shi'ite Fatimic caliphate.

In the year 1050, a fanatical Arab tribe, the Banu Hilal, started an invasion of North Africa. They caused vast destruction throughout North Africa and destroyed the old Roman city culture for ever.<sup>50</sup>

All this unrest among Muslims destroyed the church. The Christians stood between the frontlines and they became the victims for Muslim despots.<sup>51</sup>

Life as *dhimmīs* under Muslim rule was not easy. Christians in Carthage suffered more than in Egypt. They went through severe persecution by sectarian, intolerant and cruel Islamic despots.

6. One last comment. In the eighth century a mystic movement developed within Islamic society. It was called Sufism.<sup>52</sup> Mysticism tried to satisfy religious longing for unification with God.<sup>53</sup> In North Africa and Egypt Sufi brotherhoods became important. They won many former Christians for Islam because the religious practices of Sufi and churches looked similar to normal believers. They honoured the graves of mystic teachers and respected also the graves of Christian saints and martyrs. This was a special part of Donatist

<sup>48</sup> Shaw, *The Kingdom of God*, 77; Beerens, 'Christianity', 34-35.

<sup>49</sup> Beerens, 'Christianity', 34.

<sup>50</sup> Beerens, 'Christianity', 35; Troeger, 'Kirche und Mission', 5.

<sup>51</sup> Brissand, *Islam und Christentum*, 158; Beerens, 'Christianity', 40.

<sup>52</sup> Brissaud, *Islam und Christentum*, 302ff; Beerens, 'Christianity', 42.

<sup>53</sup> E. Troeger, *Kreuz und Halbmond* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1966), 18-20, 54ff.

piety; former Christians with this background found in Sufism a new spiritual home.<sup>54</sup>

Sufism with its God-seeking teachers who wandered among people fascinated Christians. Only a Christianity, which is really devoted to God and authentic in its piety, can resist Islam.

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

Copyrighted Material

---

<sup>54</sup> Beerens, 'Christianity', 42-43.

# **MARXISM AND RELIGION: THE PARADOX OF CHURCH GROWTH IN ETHIOPIA, 1974-1991**

Tibebe Eshete

## **Introduction**

This paper examines the nature of state and church encounters in Ethiopia during the period of the communist regime of 1974-1991. It describes the socio-political contexts of the Ethiopian Revolution which led to the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie I. From there it moves on to discuss the manner in which the new military rulers progressively established Marxism as a state ideology to execute their political agendas. The official institution of communism as a state doctrine and its implementation affected the entire religious sphere including the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the established national church before 1975. This paper, however, addresses state-church relations with respect to the myriads of churches subsumed under the rubric Evangelical, be they by-products of mission works like the Kale Hiwot Church, the Ethiopian Evangelical Mekane Yesus Church, or home-grown like the Pentecostal Mulu Wongel Church. Even more so, for the sake of clarity and emphasis, the paper narrows its focus to the story of the Meserete Krestos Church, the offshoot of the Mennonite missionaries, as a case in point.

## **The Ethiopian Revolution and the Coming of the Military**

In 1974, the new military rulers seized power after deposing Haile Selassie I, the last imperial monarch from the Solomonic dynasty. The deposition of the last monarch was a slow process. The military adopted a strategic policy of gradually killing the system while it was alive. After the February uprising of 1974, the military stepped into the vacuum to spearhead a popular movement. The image they initially gave of themselves to the aged Emperor was one of guardians rather than usurpers. They adopted a gradual approach of dismantling the age-old monarchy, first by dissolving the edifices of its financial institutions, followed by massive political campaigns directed against the Emperor, and then removing him from the picture altogether on 12th September 1974. Such was the nature of the 'creeping coup' that it put an end to the age-old system of monarchical rule in Ethiopia.

The officers hastily organised a Committee named Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC), but more commonly known by its

Amharic equivalent *Derg*, through which they formally took state power. Their initial ideological statement was expressed in terms of *Ityopia Tiqdem*, with a subtitle: *Yale Menem Dem* (meaning literally 'Ethiopia First, without any bloodshed'). This was the leading slogan with which the *Derg* members projected themselves to the Ethiopians since the proclamation of the PMAC.<sup>1</sup>

In a later declaration, the *Derg* also announced the initiation of a new ideology, styled as *Ye Ityopia Hebrete sebawinet* (Ethiopian Socialism), a derivative and improved version of the slogan *Ityopia Tiqdem*.<sup>2</sup> Like *Ityopia Tiqdem*, this too was a vague ideology, which more resembled communalism, rather than communism. Its main tenets were equality, the dignity of labour, common good and nationalism. The new guidelines publicly revealed the new regime's leaning towards the left. Following this, further articulation was lent to *Hebrete sebawinet* when on 20th December 1974, the new rulers proclaimed 'scientific socialism' to be the guiding ideology of the Ethiopian Revolution.

### Church and State Encounter: 1974-1991: The *Derg* on the Move

Church-state relations prior to the Ethiopia Revolution of 1974 were, to say the least, precarious, if not drastically adversarial – as was the case during the military rule. Evangelical Christianity was mainly embraced by the people in the peripheral regions in the south, west and south-western parts of Ethiopia, chiefly Wellega where the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus has a strong presence. Obviously, the Revolution that ended an oppressive social and political structure had much appeal among them. In fact, in some parts of Ethiopia, there had been dissident movements like the one in Gedio which, to a certain extent, had been inspired by the teaching of the evangelical faith.<sup>3</sup> According to Howard Brant, it was to be expected that in the early phase of the Revolution they would give enthusiastic support to the moves of the new leaders.<sup>4</sup> This was true also for

<sup>1</sup> Informant: Wubshet.

<sup>2</sup> The government equated *Itiopia Tikdem* with *Hebrete sebawinet*, and the latter was described to be an embodiment of self-reliance, equality, the dignity of labour, the supremacy of the common good, and the indivisibility of Ethiopian unity. Quoted in Seppo Sakari, 'The Challenge of Marxism to Evangelical Christianity with Special Reference to Ethiopia' (PhD thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1981), 181.

<sup>3</sup> Getachew Belete, *Elohe Ena Hale Luia* (The Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church, Literature Dept. 2000), 64.

<sup>4</sup> Brant noted, '... most church leaders supported the Revolution. It was not until many promises had been broken and anti-religious slogans were being heralded that church leaders began to read the writing on the wall. This created a problem for those of us outsiders who were watching the church being drawn ever more deeply into the web' (Howard Brant, 'Church and Mission Under Fire in Ethiopia, 1974-1977', 1984), 23. (Manuscript in possession of SIM Resource Center, SIM

the majority of the fledgling communities of Evangelical Christians in the urban centres, particularly the Pentecostals, who had suffered terribly at the hands of the officials of the previous regime.<sup>5</sup>

By and large, Evangelical Christians in Ethiopia came from a tradition that did not exhibit explicit interest in political affairs. Consequently, the lack of experience in politics was a critical disadvantage. That became a significant setback preventing them from reading the new political situation and the Revolution in general correctly. By the time the Revolution had erupted, the various Evangelical Christian groups scattered around the country and divided along denominational lines did not constitute a robust enough bloc to present a strong voice or any threat to the new rulers. As was to be expected, there was no organised and systematic response to the Revolution.

The *Derg*'s so-called *Ye Lewt Hawaria*, Apostles of Change, who in the initial years travelled from one corner of the nation to the other, sounded like itinerant preachers. In their public discourses, the Apostles of Change expounded on the theme that socialism and Christianity were two sides of the same coin. Official newspapers like the *Ethiopian Herald* peddled the same view. In fact, the newspaper condemned those who wanted to drive a wedge between the Christian faith and the philosophy of socialism.<sup>6</sup>

The *Derg* tried to catch the attention of the Ethiopian people in various ways. One by which it showed its supposedly harmless face was its open espousal and encouragement of ecumenical relations between various religions. Under the auspices of Mohammed Qaddafi, the Libyan President, a congress of Christians and Muslims was organised in Libya, 30th January-6th February 1976, on the theme of 'Religion does not divide us'. The military rulers applied a double-pronged strategy. On the one hand, they were trying to create a platform from which they could gain influence and control over the leaders of the two great religions in Ethiopia. On the other, they were keenly aware of the need to secure the support of Muslims in the unfolding Ethio-Somalia War of 1977.<sup>7</sup>

---

Archives, Charlotte, NC.) Overall, this situation robbed both the church and missionaries of the opportunity of taking proactive steps. Missionaries left Ethiopia in a haphazard manner and the church in the south and west went through a painful process before fully adjusting to the challenges of the Revolution. Howard Brant is the son of A. Brant, a missionary from SIM who lived in Ethiopia for decades.

<sup>5</sup> Informants reported to me that some Evangelical enthusiasts even compared Haile Selassie with some kings mentioned in the Bible who were known for their harsh treatment of the Israelites. Some Pentecostal preachers even preached that the Ethiopian Revolution was preordained by God, and hence gave it their blessing. Informants: Getu, Ashenafi, Negussie, and others.

<sup>6</sup> *The Ethiopian Herald*, 25th May 1975.

<sup>7</sup> According to some church-related reports, evangelical leaders participated in this government-initiated project, knowing that it was a purely political device made as a gesture of their concern for the nation, but they did not seem to take any interest in

According to informants, the dilemma of Evangelical Christians was that they had in the past been accused of being unpatriotic while they were also conscious of the fact that their past associations with foreign elements from the West made them suspect. At the same time, as minority groups, they had to develop some kind of survival strategies. By and large, Evangelical Christians in Ethiopia had lacked a track record of social engagement because of their other-worldly orientation and their strong stress on piety, holiness and purity of faith. One exception might be the case of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus which had pioneered involvement in dealing with issues such as poverty, ignorance and disease within its overall framework of 'holistic ministry'.<sup>8</sup>

Gudina Tumsa's stay in America while doing his theological education during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s inspired him to urge his church into taking up the issue of social justice. Also, his sense of disenfranchisement as one coming from the Oromo ethnic group perforce unsurprisingly caused him to be concerned and engaged in social issues and human rights. Challenging and dangerous as it was, Gudina Tumsa brought to the attention of the government the sensitive issue of land reform which had been the rallying-cry of the student movement in pre-revolutionary Ethiopia.<sup>9</sup>

It is safe to say that Evangelical Christians in Ethiopia, as a whole, did not present a vital or unified voice in speaking out against structural and other forms of political injustice in a sustained and audible manner. Most of the leadership of the Evangelical churches knew very well that the ideology that the state was advancing was inimical to their faith, and were hesitant to identify with it or give it public endorsement.<sup>10</sup>

The *Derg* announced its own version of the Chinese Cultural Revolution on 12th September 1978 when it had already been abandoned by the Chinese government because of its regrettable consequences.<sup>11</sup> The media began to call openly for the eradication of backward practices and the rooting out of alien values associated with foreign influences, an allusion to

---

pursuing it any further. Annual report of the Council of Evangelical Christians in Ethiopia prepared by Tesfa Tsion Delele, 1980, 3.

<sup>8</sup> See further Ø.M. Eide, 'Gudina Tumsa: The Voice of a Prophet', in Swedish *Missiological Themes* (Uppsala: Swedish Institute for Mission Research, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> See further Ø.M. Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia: the Growth and Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church, 1974-86* (Oxford: James Currey), 2000, 65-67.

<sup>10</sup> Ø.M. Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*.

<sup>11</sup> In his speech, Mengistu Haile Mariam, the most prominent officer of the *Derg* (President of Ethiopia, 1987-1991), stressed the fact that unless the Ethiopian people made successful campaigns on the cultural front to defeat backward cultural practices, the triumph of socialism could hardly be realised. For his full speech, see *Addis Zemen*, 16th September 1978. The ideas of the Cultural Revolution modelled on China's were more a result of the influence of widespread literature than an outcome of a direct ideological push from Beijing.

the Evangelical faith to which the tag *Mete* (literally 'newcomer') was applied.<sup>12</sup> For instance, one of the official Amharic language newspapers, *Addis Zemen*, openly stated that there were some foreign agents who, under the guise of religion, were subverting the Revolution. The newspaper mentioned that the government would not tolerate the hidden schemes of imperialists who sought to derail the Revolution by numbing the minds of the youth through idealistic thoughts.<sup>13</sup>

Beginning in June 1979, flagrant denunciations of religion appeared in official newspapers such as *Addis Zemen*. Dawit Wolde Giorgis, a former authority on the *Derg* period, noted that the highest echelons of the government had given instructions to the political cadres (party officials and their cohorts) to eliminate religion. By providing a personal witness of his close participation in several high-level meetings, he testified that religious practices had been 'disparaged in every manner possible'. Dawit adds that the military rulers began to make sweeping attacks against Evangelical Christians of the south and western parts of Ethiopia in the early 1980s with unimaginable hatred.<sup>14</sup>

Having apparently chosen the kind of society they wanted to construct, the *Derg* went ahead, not only in formulating its ideologies but with building institutions to legitimise and enforce them. The new rulers concluded that it was mandatory that the Ethiopian society be educated to adopt a socialist consciousness. For a long time it appeared that the government's strategy was to erode the edifice of faith in Ethiopia through media propaganda and mass campaigns at the local and national level, so that it would experience a slow death through attrition. Re-education was another strategy the *Derg* applied to bring about a change in worldviews.<sup>15</sup>

For instance, religious education and church-run private schools were abolished by a decree in September 1975.<sup>16</sup> Ethiopia sent several cadres abroad, mainly to the Soviet Union, to be trained to become potent agents for transmitting atheism across all levels of society and to combat a religious outlook. The *Yekatit* Political School set up in 1976 was intended

<sup>12</sup> As early as 1975, the term *Mete* was beginning to gain currency, at least in the media, to refer to Evangelicals. An article published in *Ye Zareitu Ityopia*, on 19th January, mentions the word *mete* as the products of a foreign religion, the brainchild of imperialism, preaching other-worldliness and a slovenly attitude detrimental to the progress of the country. It accused the *mete* religion of not only being counterproductive, but of sapping the ardour of the youth to combat social injustice. *Ye Zareitu Ityopia*, 19th January 1975.

<sup>13</sup> *Addis Zemen*, 21st May 1978. In fact, the newspaper was very pointed in mentioning the southern provinces and the Kale Hiwot Church of SIM (formerly standing for Sudan Interior Mission) background.

<sup>14</sup> Dawit Wolde Giorgis, *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1989), 121.

<sup>15</sup> *Ethiopian Herald*, 8th December 1974.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Costea, 'Church and State Relations in the Marxist-Leninist Regimes of the Third World', in *Journal of Church and State*, 32, 2 (1990), 302.

to train cadres and government officials to be loyal communists and propagators of communist ideology. The school system offered basic tenets of Marxism and Leninism at all levels in order to propagate atheism.<sup>17</sup>

In September 1984, the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE) was formally established and stated its chief target to be the creation of a 'new socialist man'.<sup>18</sup> With the formation of the party, the regime sought to reinforce its control over Ethiopian society. The establishment of the party increased the *Derg's* capacity to undertake massive political education and created the basis for a steady campaign against Evangelicals.<sup>19</sup>

### State and Church Encounters

One of the initial organised responses of the Evangelical church was to found a common informal forum. In 1974, interested groups from various denominations started to hold prayer and discussion meetings at the Bible Society in Addis Ababa. Their major concern was to discuss how the churches from different denominations might adjust to the new winds of change, especially to the growing influence of communism. Interested leaders of various churches such as Gudina Tumsa, Captain Yohannes Ijigu, Tesfa Tsion, Hailu Wolde Semayat, Ement Araya, Meskel Kebra, Wubshet Dessalegne and Tilahun Haile, broached the issue of the role of the evangelical church with respect to its involvement in the larger societal affairs, and what kind of part it would play vis-à-vis the current situation. As an initial step, it was decided to present a series of lessons to the Ethiopian people on themes of repentance, reconciliation, justice and peace over Radio Voice of the Gospel (owned by the Lutheran World Federation, established in 1963 and nationalised in 1977) and the *Mesekre Berhan* magazine.<sup>20</sup> The move was definitely mingled with guilt with regard to the lack of action in the past, and was also a call for inclusion.

<sup>17</sup> Teshome G. Wagaw, *The Development of Higher Education and Social Change* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, 1990), 241. Those of us who were either students or teachers in colleges and universities have witnessed this development. As a student and later as a young lecturer in the university, I personally witnessed the various indoctrination projects, either incorporated in the curricula or coercively instituted to inculcate revolutionary consciousness, as the rulers uncharacteristically referred to it.

<sup>18</sup> For the formation of the party in 1984 and the preparation of the feast to celebrate its inauguration, about \$45 million were spent. This was at the time when severe drought brought untold havoc to millions of Ethiopians. *Africa Reporter*, 30, 2 (1985), 54.

<sup>19</sup> *Christianity Today* reported that just a week after the tenth anniversary of the Revolution, which coincided with the formation of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia, no less than 700 churches were closed in one province alone. *Christianity Today*, 4th October 1985, 70.

<sup>20</sup> Deniel Fite, 'The Challenge of Denominational Conflict in the Context of the Ethiopian Evangelical Churches.' Senior essay MYS, Addis Ababa, 2001, 19.



Another step taken by interested leaders of the various Evangelical churches was the calling of an interdenominational pastors' conference for prayer and consultations on issues of common concern. It was at one of these conferences that the idea of forming a Council for the Co-operation of Churches in Ethiopia (CCCE) was conceived. Known locally as *Yemetebaber Gubae*, CCCE was formed on 2nd October 1976 as an ecumenical forum to draw together various Christian groups with the intention of presenting a corporate voice in the evolving political and social reality of Ethiopia.<sup>21</sup>

Founding members of the CCCE were the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian Catholic Church and representatives of various Evangelical churches. Gudina Tumsa, pioneer of this ecumenical initiative, was perceived by the government to be dangerous and was being closely followed by its spies. He was first arrested in late 1978, and then again in June 1979, after which nothing was heard about him except his reported disappearance. Gudina Tumsa was a prominent leader who was capable of reading the times, interpreting trends, and of providing theological articulations to the church.<sup>22</sup> Hence, his disappearance was a serious blow to the Evangelical church. Gudina Tumsa may not have wholly succeeded in his vision of bringing unity among various Christian faith groups. The seed he planted however, at least among Evangelical Christians, and the

---

<sup>21</sup> According to Gudina Tumsa, the word 'ecumenical' expresses a holistic approach of various churches working together for the furtherance of the causes of common interest and greater good. It also describes the unity of the churches of the same Christian faith family, irrespective of denominations and doctrinal differences, to withstand the challenges of the times. Gudina set up CCCE under the principle outlined in John 17:21-22, which stressed unity. Debela Birri, 'Rev Gudina Tumsa and the Ecumenical Movement of the 1970s', in *The Life and Ministry of Rev. Gudina Tumsa* (Addis Ababa: 2001), 130. In essence, Gudina was raising the mantle of the Evangelical pioneers who struggled for the formation of the Evangelical Alliance, which could not materialise for lack of a clear theological framework of ecumenism and because of the unwillingness of the missionaries to see the fruition of the project. Founding members of the CCCE include the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, The Ethiopian Catholic Church, Kale Hiwot Church, EECMY, Mulu Wongel Church and others. For more on the life and times of Gudina and the EECMY of which he was its General Secretary, see Ø.M, Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*.

<sup>22</sup> The reason why the Evangelical churches had not produced theologians was mainly due to the policy of various missionaries whose emphasis was on mass evangelism and lower-level institutions without emphasis on high-level theological seminaries. Again, an exception can be made of the EECMY. Since its formal constitution was written in 1959, EECMY had plans to set up theological training institutions that eventually culminated in the formation of the Mekane Yesus Seminary founded in 1962.

pressures that the churches had to bear brought them to a default position of unity.<sup>23</sup>

It should be stated that Gudina Tumsa was not the only victim, Abune Tewoflos, the second Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was also brutally executed by the *Derg* in 1979.

### The Church Goes Underground

The persecution of Christians in Ethiopia has a long history. In southern Ethiopia, it took place during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, 1936-41, which ironically resulted in a unique mass revival.<sup>24</sup> It was also not something unusual in imperial Ethiopia for those professing the Evangelical faith. There are countless stories of people in the Kambata and Hadiya regions encountering sustained persecution, including imprisonment, whose release was secured through endless litigations in defence of religious freedom with the invoking of the famous dictum of the Emperor: 'The nation is for all; religion is private.'<sup>25</sup>

Persecution under the *Derg* took different forms. Some of the steps that the government adopted to weaken the church and force people to deny their faith were conducting denunciation meetings (*Yemagalet Zemecha*) with the aim of causing public embarrassment. It was in such meetings that Christians were exposed and condemned as idealists and enemies of the Revolution. Such public condemnations were followed by debasing acts, such as throwing or ripping the pages out of the Bible. The believers were made to parade through the streets and were ridiculed either as *Hasabawyan* (idealists) or *Pentes* (derisive reference to the Ethiopian Pentecostals), and branded as enemies of the Revolution.<sup>26</sup>

Another move was forcing men and women to shout slogans. One of the main reasons for the intensification of the plight of Christians was their refusal to salute the Revolution with their left hand and chant slogans. Christians abstained from shouting slogans to demonstrate loyalty for their faith as some of the slogans were found to be affronts to the basic tenets of

---

<sup>23</sup> No one knew what happened to Gudina Tumsa. It was only years after the collapse of Mengistu's regime that it was revealed he had been killed and buried the same night that he was abducted. His remains were located, and a funeral was held on 27th June 1992.

<sup>24</sup> See further Raymond Davis, *Fire on the Mountain* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 1966.

<sup>25</sup> Witness the case of those of Heramo Anamo, Wontamo Anamo, Doche, Funuro, and others who were arrested and jailed in 1953 as followers of *Yesus Mana*, an allusion to the adherents of the new Evangelical faith. In fact, Funu died while in prison. Informant: Melese Heramo.

<sup>26</sup> Informant: Teshome. The term *Pente*, in spite of its derogatory origin, has now become shorthand or rubric to all Evangelical Christians in Ethiopia who may not embrace Pentecostal doctrines.

their religious sensibilities. The slogans which were particularly offensive were: 'Forward with our leader Mengistu', 'We shall bring nature under our control', 'Death to the enemies of the Revolution', 'Religion is drudging the Mass', and 'Above all is the Revolution'. The last slogan, in particular, was bitterly resisted because Evangelicals believed it contradicted their core values. Christians satirically shouted louder with slogans like 'We Shall Overcome', to speak to their own situation.<sup>27</sup> Several Christians who adamantly refused to chant slogans were thrown into jail for years, accused of being anti-revolutionaries.

Persecution particularly targeted the youth. This stemmed from the fact that there was a growing apathy to Marxism and an increased interest in religion. Even some government newspapers were admitting the fact and were airing their concerns about this situation. For instance, a letter written to the editor of the *Ethiopian Herald*, states: 'Some youth are still under the spell of reactionaries... some youth have abandoned political sentiments and have become totally apolitical. The number of youth who are committing *themselves to biblical studies is on the upswing*.'<sup>28</sup>

It is interesting to note that, during the Revolution, evangelical Christianity experienced not only growth but also a shift. What was largely a rural phenomenon became urban, as an increasing number of intellectuals and the youth in major cities embraced the faith, thus lending Evangelical Christianity more of a national face rather than a sectarian, rural or peripheral one.

### **The Case of the Meserete Krestos Church (MKC)**

The Meserete Krestos church was an offshoot of Mennonite missionary activities in Ethiopia. MKC's establishment in urban areas had attracted students from high schools and colleges. Some of these students later provided valued leadership to the church and proved to be great assets to the Evangelical church at large during the period of the Revolution.

In order to withstand the challenge of Marxism, church leadership proactively identified among its members those who could serve as resources to assemble materials and teach members of the church at all levels the basics of Marxism, science and faith, creationism and evolution. Lectures were given on important topics like 'Christianity and Socialism', 'Christianity and evolution', 'The Church and its compassionate service to the society', etc. The various teachings were meant to educate leaders, evangelists and rank-and-file members to be well informed, not only about

<sup>27</sup> Tesfaye put it very succinctly: In the past, the battle was between one form of faith with another. Under the new regime, the battle was between faith and its denial/unbelief. The latter had to be fought more aggressively.

<sup>28</sup> *The Ethiopian Herald*, 25th October 1978.

their faith, but about secular ideas that might challenge their beliefs, so that they would be better prepared and equipped to counter them.<sup>29</sup>

Another major step taken by the church was to set up a committee of knowledgeable people to study scientific socialism extensively and prepare resource materials. The committee conducted extensive studies on communism and related topics, and prepared documents in Amharic which were thorough but easy enough to be understood by Christians of average education. Some of the major documents produced were entitled: *Fitret Yemeskir* (Let creation speak), *Enkade?* (Shall we deny it?), *Emenet Siffeten* (When faith is tried/tested), and *Metsehaf Qidus Men Yilal?* (What does the Bible say?).<sup>30</sup> These documents were distributed not only to church members but also to other evangelical groups outside the Mennonite tradition.<sup>31</sup> Literature production was a significant aspect of the MKC's survival strategy.

The *Derg*'s propaganda against Christianity increased, especially at local level where MKC had branch churches. At local level, the cadre's public pronouncement that religion was the opiate of the people was heightened. Rising state rhetoric began to point towards the MKC as a church that had connections with American missionaries. The rhetoric gave way to action, as officials began methodically rounding up its key leaders, one by one, with the intention of crippling the church. As new leaders stepped in and the church continued its activities, the officials grew more infuriated and took the abrupt decision to close the church in Addis Ababa and in the provinces.<sup>32</sup>

What drew the attention of the government towards MKC was a thriving charismatic local church located on Bole Road, in Addis Ababa. A charismatic evangelist, Daniel Mekonen, introduced a healing ministry which soon increased the visibility of the church with stories of miraculous healings. The Bole MKC church was drawing converts in large numbers.

<sup>29</sup> *The Ethiopian Herald*.

<sup>30</sup> Nathan Hege, *Beyond our Prayers* (Scottsdale Herald Press, 1998), 167; Tilahun, 110; The documents were prepared by Bedru Hussien, Solomon Kebede and others, who were graduates of Haile Selassie I University and who were key actors in the Pentecostal movement of the 1960s. Informants: Solomon Kebede, Bedru Hussein and Balcha Deneged. On the recent historiography of Pentecostalism in Ethiopia, see Jörg Haustein, *Writing Religious History: The Historiography of Ethiopian Pentecostalism* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz), 2011 (Studies in the History of Christianity in the Non-Western World).

<sup>31</sup> The *Derg* officials soon discovered that the materials were in circulation and banned them. Whoever was found in possession of any of the materials was immediately arrested. Informants: Tilahun, Millions, Sehen, Berhanu and others.

<sup>32</sup> Upon closing a church in Addis Ababa, the local security guard who confiscated the documents belonging to the church found a file containing the name with the initial letters CIA, standing for an organisation called Church Investment Association, but which was immediately taken as proof of the church's supposed connection with the Central Intelligence Agency. Hege, *Beyond Our Prayers*, 24.

Its Sunday programmes were extended by opening up additional services.<sup>33</sup> An average of 5,000 people gathered every Sunday at this local church. An observer who visited the church in 1981 describes the scene as follows: 'I looked at every crowd gathering in that churchyard and I still could not believe what I saw. The majority of the people were young... When the building was open, the surge toward the door began... Soon the benches were packed full, and those who didn't get in filled up the shelters on either side of the outside wall.'<sup>34</sup>

What really incensed the local officials was the growing attraction of the youth toward faith, as was evidenced in the slackening of attendance in government-sponsored youth meetings which were intentionally held on Sundays to distract the youth from going to church. The officials observed the difference in the mood of the youth as they came to church with such eagerness to find seats, whereas they reluctantly dragged their feet when called to attend political meetings. It was irritating to the rulers to see the main street of Bole (between the international airport and Revolutionary Square) being filled with multitudes of people coming from church. Bedru, a prominent leader of the church, commented: 'The event witnessed at the Bole MKC, in a way, provided government officials a microscopic picture of their doom.'<sup>35</sup> Suddenly on 25th January 1982, government cadres closed the church with the simple statement, 'This church shall be closed and it will be the property of the Ethiopian government.' Latter, the church was turned into a primary school under the name, *Ye Abiot Ermija*, Revolutionary Action/Stride.<sup>36</sup>

Local government officials took a series of measures against other MKC churches throughout the country following the closure of Bole parish church. Between 25th January and 17th August 1982, twelve other churches were closed. Girma Zewde provides a document that shows the government's order of the confiscation of the Mennonite Bookshop and all educational institutions that belonged to the MKC, including the Bible Academy and a number of primary schools in Addis and the provinces.<sup>37</sup> At

<sup>33</sup> An observer from the Mennonite Mission, who visited the church on 3rd July 1977, saw in the second service dozens of people worshipping outside the church in the rain as there was no remaining space inside. H. Leaman to Executive Ministries, 18th July 1977. F.N 1463, Ethiopia, MN Archives, G/I.

<sup>34</sup> Janet Kreider, 'A Vision Fulfilled', editorial in *Mennonite Mission*, 24th September 1981, quoted in Hege, 171.

<sup>35</sup> Informant: Bedru Hussein.

<sup>36</sup> Not only were church buildings taken away, but the government froze all bank accounts belonging to MKC and later emptied them.

<sup>37</sup> See further Girma Zewde, *Ityopis* (Addis Ababa: Neged Matemia Bet, 1985). This is a document of great significance because it was clear evidence that the state was giving instructions for local officials to take action against churches. Most high-level instructions were communicated to local officials orally, in meetings or telephone conversations, to avoid the risk of being found out. Throughout the period of the revolution, *Derg* officials denied direct state intervention in the affairs of the

the same time, the government hunted down leaders of the church in their homes and workplaces and put them in jail. The rulers hoped in vain that the church would be in disarray once it had been shorn of its vital leadership. Most of the MKC leaders remained in prison for nearly five years.<sup>38</sup> The ill-treatment and physical torture inflicted upon some of the imprisoned leaders were so severe that some of them experienced serious health complications. For instance, Kalifa, one of the youngest and most prominent leaders, died soon after he had been released from prison.

Given the situation, the church had no option but to re-engineer a new space and retool itself into an underground structure and adapt a strategy called *Yegubegna agelglot*, the Gate Keeper's Service, which functioned to guard the gate of the church against physical and ideological attacks of the state. The MKC leadership organised one of the most effective underground churches in Ethiopia during the period of the Revolution.

An interim leadership emerged to take the place of those in prison. The leadership met secretly to critically reflect upon the new direction the church ought to be taking. Eventually, it was decided to establish an underground structure with clandestine leadership.

The clandestine nature of its operation demanded that MKC redesign its approach and restructure its space to stave off mounting persecution.

Instead of a visible church as a place of worship common to all, cell groups, consisting of five to seven people, were set up in every residential quarter. Each cell had its own leader. Each cell group would meet regularly for two or three hours each week to study. Scriptural materials were prepared centrally by the literature and resource division of the new underground structure. Members of the various cell groups studied uniform materials so that everybody was at the same stage. Meeting places usually rotated at the suggestion of the group leaders and with the agreement of participants. In general, early morning or evening sessions rather than the usual Sunday service hours were preferred for meetings. In principle, cell group members were not supposed to know about the functions of the others.<sup>39</sup>

Women displayed an unusual interest in and commitment to the underground work.<sup>40</sup> They gave considerable support to the church by forming chains of prayer groups, providing hospitality and counselling

Copyrighted Material

---

church. For a complete content of the paper, see the appendix section. Girma, 146-47.

<sup>38</sup> The six top leaders of the MKC who were thrown into the most infamous prison centre, the Central Investigation Department, were: Shemshedin Abdo, Kiron Bihon, Negash Kebede, Tilahum Beyene, Abebe Gorfu, and Kalifa Alie who died shortly after his release because of injuries associated with the tortures and hardships he endured while in prison. Hege, *Beyond our Prayers* 184-85.

<sup>39</sup> Informants: Mulugeta, Bedru, Girma, Sehn and Mulu.

<sup>40</sup> Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 203.

services to needy members of the church.<sup>41</sup> The MKC experience demonstrates the general pattern that, by intent or default, the Ethiopian Revolution raised the profile of women in Ethiopian society with major societal and cultural shifts and implications. It can safely be stated that the period of the *Derg* was a blessing in disguise for Ethiopian women. As was the case in the area of politics, where many had risen to prominent positions, so was the situation in the church. The underground structure, relatively free from the strictures of hierarchical organisations, allowed scope for women to be more involved in the activities of the church. As a result, there were women preachers and evangelists breaking new ground in the religious traditions of Ethiopia.

The cell organisation expanded through a process of multiplication as new converts were added to the group. The issue of including new members in the underground structure was very sensitive. Special care and follow-up programmes were devised to fully incorporate them into the formation. They were given a special 'discipleship programme' for an extended period, and several screening systems were applied before they were baptised. At the same time, new recruits received intensive instruction to establish them in the faith.

By mid-March, only six weeks after the MKC had been closed, the establishment of the underground church was virtually complete. The 2,000 members of the MKC in Addis Ababa had been organised into scores of home cells. MKC churches in the provinces followed the same pattern. In this manner, MKC entered into a new phase of its history, a process of taking root, consolidation and, ironically, phenomenal growth.

Persecution made the church very strong, assertive and uncompromising. An MKC evangelist noted: 'Once we had a pulpit for preaching, an office for appointments. Now our only way of working is going from home to home. We are much busier now. The present situation may be better. It is much more normal.'<sup>42</sup> A report by Kreider indicates that the closure of the church in Nazareth gave birth to another forty churches. A church leader, whom Kreider spoke to, said, 'In Jerusalem, when the disciples were together, they liked each other but they had to split, scatter, and the church grew... The government does not understand the church. They think it is a place of meeting. The church is not closed, they can't close the church, they can't close our hearts.'<sup>43</sup> When the church in Addis Ababa was closed, it only had one congregation but by 1991, it had risen to six. Membership size also rose from 5,000 to a total of 114, 000.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Overall, the issues of women vis-à-vis the Ethiopian Revolution is an important topic that requires critical study.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Robert S. Kreider, 'Reflections on the Meserete Krestos Church', 11th April-2nd May 1982, 3. FN EX 20, Ethiopia, MN Archives, G/I.

<sup>43</sup> Kreider, 'Reflections on the Meserete Krestos Church', 2.

<sup>44</sup> Tilahun, *Yemeseret Krestos Bete Krestyian Tarik* (Addis Ababa, Mega Publishers), 170.



### Issues of Growth and Context

As to the question, 'What led to the church to experience such a remarkable growth?' informants unanimously maintain that this growth could only be explained in non-material terms. Lemma Eshetu opines, 'We were praying and fasting and witnessing and saving souls... it was our business to save people from fire. During the *Derg* period, we threw our net far and wide. We had to hasten the pace and double our efforts, for business was not as usual.'<sup>45</sup> Solomon, a prominent leader of the MKC, observed that: 'during the Revolution we were engaged in an all-consuming pursuit of saving people at any cost. We knew the nation was going in the wrong direction; we wanted to salvage what we could, and that sense of mission lent us the willingness to sacrifice. In addition to the mission impulse, the Revolution itself tied us together inseparably'.<sup>46</sup> Evangelist Shibeshi also noted: 'The Revolution sharpened our focus as evangelisation became the central theme, *re'es* of our life.'<sup>47</sup> By and large, Ethiopian Evangelicals do not lay stress on the role of the individual as an agent and actor in history, and the contribution of personal commitment and sacrifice for church growth, yet it is a serious factor that should be recognised. Stories of individuals creating invisible churches with hundreds of members in prison houses, tell of men and women languishing in jails for several years for no other reason save for defending their faith; reports of Christians who put up with floggings, electric tortures, and yet continued to teach the Gospel with added vigour and enthusiasm constitute sagas of faith and courage in the midst of terrible ordeals.

### Gospel Song-Voices from the Margins

Resistance, in its political sense, suggests actions or expressions of opposition to intentionally counter, challenge and dismantle a system. As noted earlier, protest of this sort did not characterise the Evangelical churches in Ethiopia. But there are varied expressions of dissent which appear to be mute but active, demonstrating furtive rejection of authority and its prevailing legitimating principles.<sup>48</sup> Defiance of Marxist ideology by insisting on the supremacy of faith and abstention from the shouting of slogans which promoted the power of the rulers and their ideologies, and

<sup>45</sup> Informants: Lemma Eshetu. Lemma's views have been echoed by other informants such as Bekele, Kasahun, and others.

<sup>46</sup> Informant: Solomon Kebede.

<sup>47</sup> Informant: Shibeshi Taddese.

<sup>48</sup> Though in the broader African context, Jon Abbink revisits the notion of resistance by lending it an enlarged meaning to include innuendo, imagination, politics of memory, and a host of non-compliant and indirect ways of defiance and expressions of protest. See further Jon Abbink, 'Rethinking Resistance in African History: An Introduction', in Jon Abbink, Mirjam De Bruijn and Klass Van Walraven (eds), (London: Brill, 2003), 1-40.



the daring messages of preachers, composers and singers of gospel songs against the philosophy of atheism, constituted indirect forms of confrontation. There were many songs composed to uplift the sovereignty of God during the time of the Revolution. To cite but a few, they included: *Etagelalehu*, I will fight the faith; *Dinq new lene geta*, God is wonderful to me; *El Shaddie*, God is Almighty; *Keber Yegebahal*; Glory be unto you; *Semay zufanu new*, Heaven is his Throne;<sup>49</sup> *Dinq qal*, Amazing Word; *Bewengel alafrem*, I am not ashamed of the Gospel; *Getachen new kehumum belay*, Our Lord is above all things (based on John 3:31: 'The one who comes from above is above all'). These all came out in 1978 in response to the slogan 'The Revolution is above everything'. And the song *Egziabher yemesgen kemilut honenal* (We are amongst those praising Thee) was sung to counter the new style of socialist greetings that was being gradually promoted. To provide one poignant example: for the question 'How are you?' the new response was *enashenfalen* (We shall win), or simply *Dehena* (Fine), instead of the traditional *Egziabeher Yemesgen* (Praise be to God). The insistence on the use of such neutral greetings on the part of the rulers, obviously, was intended to tone down and subvert the religious moorings of normative or conventional styles of salutations. In a somewhat oblique fashion, Evangelical Christians demonstrated a unique steadfastness in not succumbing glibly to the pressure of the day by paying extraordinary sacrifices. The church subverted dominant ideology by providing a counterweight that discursively subverted the political system. Gospel music also provided an alternative social-cultural scope to counter Marxism, the havoc it has created in the society, and its homogenising tendency. Witness the following songs: *Zingero aydelhum*, I am not an ape; and *engeda neger*, Strange happenings. Some of the songs had prophetic messages as they pronounced the end of the dark days and the ushering in of a new era. Two good examples are Tamirat's *Eskezare dres redtonal*, We have been helped thus far; and *badis zemen adis neger*, New things in a new era. Some demonstrated a note of defiance like Tamirat's *Denq new lene geta*, and Tesfaye's *Kamlakachew beker*, Except their God. Through their songs, Evangelicals invoked transcendental realities by which the state is called to judgement; hence, gospels songs can be characterised as a folk theology of resistance. In the words of one prominent rally note: 'The mouth opened more when it was stifled more; the more the voice was muted, the more the spirit shouted.'<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusion

Significantly, the Revolution created the opportunity for Evangelical Christianity to experience a higher level of nationalisation. This was made

<sup>49</sup> Taken from recorded cassette songs and personal interviews.

<sup>50</sup> Informant; Shiferaw Wolde Michael.

possible mainly due to the expulsion of expatriate missionaries and the emergence of national leaders to fill the crucial gaps. This is also evidenced in the fact that in most of the former mission-based churches, worship and liturgical services also assumed distinctly national dimensions.

A lay leadership consisting of dedicated volunteers emerged, essentially due to the vacuum that had been created, either because of the arrest or the flight of the church's top leadership from the country. Leadership by the laity, very democratic, adroit, and energetic, emerged. Members of the new leadership that stepped in to fill the gap were fruits of the period of the Revolution. They were mainly young men and women – professionals, with skills and a measure of education, expediently used by the church to withstand its new challenges.<sup>51</sup>

For most Evangelicals, the Revolution drove Christianity into the heart of the people where faith was observed, not simply by going to church but by being claimed, lived and manifested existentially. Gospel songs that came from the pit of suffering not only provided solace and comfort, but became the chief avenues by which the Evangelical church assumed its indigenous identity.<sup>52</sup>

The process of collective grappling into which the Revolution forced the church gave Evangelical churches defining moments that helped considerably to shape their identity. A noted leader of the church during the Revolution commented:

Persecution winnowed the church like a threshing machine, separating us from the world and emerging like the New Testament church model. It gave us a new sense of who we are. If there was ever a time when the Evangelical faith got a much firmer base and ground among its believers, it was during the time of the Revolution. Thank God for the Revolution. It has tossed Ethiopian Christians into the air so that the chaff has been lost to us and we are left with the true grains.<sup>53</sup>

It is fair to say that the story of the Evangelical Christians during the *Derg* period is the story of a human saga, the story of man's spirit refusing to be defeated by man's cruelty. The Revolution also created a sociological moment for a conversion quest that paved the way for the Evangelical churches to experience revival and large-scale expansion. The Evangelical church in Ethiopia had experienced such a moment, first, during the period

Copyrighted Material

<sup>51</sup> Examples include Bedru, Melesachew, Alem, Solomon, etc.

<sup>52</sup> A typical case of the spread of Pentecostalism in a mainline Evangelical church is the case of the EECMY. The influence of the Pentecostal movement began to be felt in the EECMY in the early 1970s and spread through other parish churches, both in Addis Ababa and elsewhere. See further Teka Obsfgi, 'The Charismatic Movement in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus' (MA Thesis, EGST, 2000). For the general expansion of Pentecostalism in other denominations, see Taye Abdisa, 'The Pentecostal Movement Development and the rise of the Charismatic Movement in Ethiopia' (Senior essay, MYS 1977).

<sup>53</sup> Informant, Shiferaw. This has also been attested by Bekele, Yenagu, and others.

of the Italian occupation, secondly, during the Marxist Revolution, and in contemporary Ethiopia because of the turbulent regime change of 1991 and the period after Mengistu when the country has been decentralised. The momentum the Revolution had engendered is still unfolding. Today, the church has entered into a new testing moment as it is struggling to break out of its 'turtle-oriented' tradition and engage in the broader socio-political issues of Ethiopian society.

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

# FREEDOM OF BELIEF AND THE CHURCH IN ERITREA

Daniel Rezene Mekonnen and Kjetil Tronvoll

## Introduction

This chapter emerges from a range of practical and scholarly activities we have undertaken for many years, and in different capacities, in which context a number of assertions articulated here were also in the past discussed in different media of publication.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, we discuss obstacles and attacks on freedom of belief in Eritrea in the context of the persecution of Christians in the country.

Our main departure point is the assertion that ‘freedom of religion and belief’ is a core value of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, in keeping with the overarching theme of the current volume, which is ‘Freedom of Belief and Christian Mission’, our chapter consciously restricts itself to a discussion of religious freedom in the context of the persecution of Christians in Eritrea. Related to this issue is the expulsion of foreign missionaries and Christian development workers, which took place at different times. This does not mean that other religious groups in Eritrea are well protected or spared persecution. In fact, when it comes to persecution on the grounds of political opinion and religious belief, the Eritrean government is widely known as an ‘equal opportunity oppressor’.<sup>2</sup>

The chapter has a strong scholarly component, which is simultaneously informed by the need for a practical approach towards ending the pervasive culture of impunity in Eritrea. This is so because the prevailing political repression in Eritrea has sweeping consequences for every aspect of Eritrean life, not just for the right to freedom of belief. Our understanding

---

<sup>1</sup> One such work is K. Tronvoll and D.R. Mekonnen, *The African Garrison State: Human Rights and Political Development in Eritrea* (Oxford: James Currey, 2014). See also interview with the authors in *The African Griot*, Issue 6, autumn 2014, available at: [www.boydellandbrewer.com/content/docs/The%20African%20Garrison%20State.pdf](http://www.boydellandbrewer.com/content/docs/The%20African%20Garrison%20State.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Examples of other contributions on religious persecution in Eritrea include D.R. Mekonnen and Selam Kidane, ‘The troubled relationship of state and religion in Eritrea’, *African Journal of Human Rights Law Journal* 14.1 (2014), 244-65; D.R. Mekonnen and M. van Reisen, ‘Religious persecution in Eritrea and the role of the European Union in tackling the challenge’, in N. Reilly and S.S. Furlong (eds), *Religion, Gender and the Public Sphere* (Routledge: New York & London, 2014), 232-41.

in this regard is premised on an appreciation of the dire state of human rights in Eritrea.

In the next two sections we will be charting the prevailing political context in Eritrea, starting with the early years of independence. We also provide a brief history of Christianity in Eritrea before discussing the real obstacles and attacks against freedom of belief. On the positive side, we briefly discuss a newly emerging trend of 'liberation theology' in Eritrea, which manifested itself in the form of a widely publicised 'pastoral letter', authored by four Eritrean Catholic bishops in May 2014. We conclude by summarising the major challenges and suggesting practical recommendations for improvement.

### The Political Context

Eritrea is a one-party state with an appalling record on human rights. It is located on the Horn of Africa, a region often referred to as a one of the most conflict-ridden corners of the world. As the second youngest country in Africa, Eritrea gained its independence from Ethiopia in 1991 and was formally recognised by the international community as an independent state after a referendum in 1993. Eritrea's modern history is detrimentally shaped by a long history of mass political violence (with the exception of a brief respite between 1991 and 1997).

At the centre of the political crisis in Eritrea is a debilitating and pervasive challenge of militarisation that has literally changed the country into 'a garrison state'. Certainly, based on the dictionary meaning of the term, Eritrea has become 'a state organised to serve primarily its own need for military security' or 'a state maintained by military power'.<sup>3</sup> In the academic sense of the term, Eritrea may not possess sophisticated levels of military technology and might, as compared with the more powerful states in the world. However, the level of militarisation in the country is comparable to none in the African continent, with one or two exceptions in the rest of the world. Thus, the expression of 'The African Garrison State' is befitting for Eritrea.<sup>4</sup> We examine the issue of freedom of belief in Eritrea within this broader context.

Copyrighted Material

### Early Years of Independence

After liberation from Ethiopia, Eritrea saw a relatively peaceful political transition of about seven years (although with smaller border skirmishes with Sudan, Djibouti and Yemen), until it was embroiled in a devastating border war (again with Ethiopia) that was fought between 1998 and 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Merriam Webster Online Dictionary: 'Garrison state': [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/garrison%20state](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/garrison%20state), accessed 16th October 2014.

<sup>4</sup> See generally Tronvoll and Mekonnen, *The African Garrison State*.

In the aftermath of the war, several former liberation leaders started to question what went wrong, and why a new war had to be fought with Ethiopia so soon after ending the war of liberation (just seven years after the country's independence)?

Accordingly, a reform movement was formed by senior government officials, which enjoyed the support of a nascent free press and a considerable part of the Eritrean society. The reform movement criticised the former liberation leader and state president (Isaias Afwerki) for his monopolisation of state power and the decision to go to war against Ethiopia without proper political consultation. To the country's detriment, the reform movement was ruthlessly crushed by the state president and his close aides in September 2001, at a time when residual matters arising from the 1998-2000 border conflict with Ethiopia were not fully resolved.

Moreover, the *de facto* 'state of emergency' informally proclaimed during the border conflict with Ethiopia was never lifted and remains intact at the time of writing. This has paved the way for an entrenched totalitarian rule by the state president, which has been characterised by exceeding levels of militarisation and systematic, gross and widespread human rights violations, including a pervasive practice of religious persecution.

### **A Brief History of Christianity in Eritrea**

As a background, it is important to briefly revisit the ethno-linguistic and religious make-up of Eritrean society. There are at least four religious groups whose existence is officially recognised by the state: Islam, of the Sunni rite; the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church, part of the worldwide Coptic Orthodox Church of the eastern rite; the Eritrean Catholic Church, part of the worldwide Roman Catholic movement; and the Eritrean Evangelical Church, part of the Lutheran World Federation. Eritrea also has adherents of indigenous belief systems, which include the veneration of ancestral saints and other supernatural forces or agencies. The Bahá'í faith, Jehovah's Witnesses and Judaism are also practised in Eritrea, albeit to a very small or insignificant degree compared with other religions.<sup>5</sup> New charismatic Christian denominations (such as Pentecostalism) are growing in adherents, although no official statistics are available to account for their numbers.

There are nine officially recognised ethnic groups, which are: Tigrinya, Tigre, Afar, Saho, Hidarib, Bilen, Nara, Kunama and Rashaida. However, there are also other smaller communities which request official recognition as distinct ethnic groups and whose claim has never been officially addressed by the government. These are the two Muslim communities of Jeberti and Tekurir. The Jeberti speak Tigrinya and the government considers them part of the Tigrinya ethnic group. The Tekurir, who are

---

<sup>5</sup> Mekonnen and Kidane, 'The troubled relationship of state and religion in Eritrea'.

believed to be recently-settled descendants of the Hausa tribe in Nigeria, speak Arabic with an accent.<sup>6</sup> In the group of officially unrecognised communities, some also add the category of mixed-race Italians.<sup>7</sup>

The religious, linguistic and ethnic plurality of Eritrea is attributed, among other things, to the long history of colonialism and trans-continental migration which dates back to the early history of the two most prominent religions in the region: Christianity and Islam. Next to ancient Mosaic belief and indigenous belief systems of the country, Christianity is regarded as the third oldest religion in Eritrea. With the Eritrean Orthodox Church as the oldest embodiment of Christianity, Eritrea is described as one of the earliest African homes to an 'indigenous form'<sup>8</sup> of Christianity, the other two being the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Egyptian Coptic Church. As a result, antiquity is a distinctive feature of the Eritrean Orthodox Church.

Historian Uoldelul Dirar traces the introduction of Orthodox Christianity into Eritrea to AD 320, a time which is characterised as the early apostolic era. According to him, Eritrean Christian tradition 'attributes this to the missionary efforts of a group of nine monks who came from different areas of the Oriental Christian world at the end of the fifth century'.<sup>9</sup> From that time, throughout the mediæval and post-mediæval period up to the mid-eighteenth century, Orthodox Christianity not only enjoyed 'a long season of fervid proselytism' but also 'provided spiritual guidance' and 'a framework for the maintenance and reproduction of the existing social order'.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, it is important to remember that Islam arrived in Eritrea at the same time as its founder and most iconic figure, Prophet Muhammad, began preaching the religion.<sup>11</sup>

From the above, it follows that Eritrea is one of the ancient places where 'Christian mission' was introduced. In this context, 'Christian mission' is understood as a religious mission whose main objective is 'the propagation

<sup>6</sup> On the question of Jeberti and Tekurir, see generally Simon M. Weldehaimanot, 'Eritrea: Constitutional, legislative and administrative provisions concerning indigenous peoples', in International Labour Organization and African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (eds), *The Constitutional and Legislative Protection of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Country Reports* (Pretoria, PUPL: 2009), 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> See J.E. Magnet and T. Yalkin, 'Governance and its future in Eritrea', Concept Note of a one-day colloquium on Eritrea, held on 1st October 2014, in Ottawa, Canada (on file with authors).

<sup>8</sup> Jan Abbink, 'An historical-anthropological approach to Islam in Ethiopia: Issues of identity and politics', in *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 11.2 (1998), 110.

<sup>9</sup> Uoldelul Chelati Dirar, 'Church-state relations in colonial Eritrea: Missionaries and the development of colonial strategies (1869-1911)', in *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 8.3 (2003), 392.

<sup>10</sup> Dirar, 'Church-state relations in colonial Eritrea', 392.

<sup>11</sup> Dirar, 'Church-state relations in colonial Eritrea', 393.

of the Christian faith'<sup>12</sup> via preaching the Gospel, often mingled with another major concomitant objective (which is inherently part and parcel of gospel preaching), namely, proselytising. It is this aspect of Christian mission that finds itself in stark contrast to the ideological roots of the government in Eritrea. Following this, it is natural to ask: why is it then that Eritrea, which is seen as one of the earliest recipients of Christianity, has now become a country with one of the most appalling records of religious freedom?

### The Genesis of Religious Persecution

The nature of human rights violations in Eritrea, particularly of the last thirteen years, is gross, widespread and systematic. Every segment of Eritrean society is affected by this. Religious persecution is but only one aspect, and cannot be seen in isolation. However, in order to understand how Eritrea has become one of the most dangerous places for some segments of Christianity, we need to take a brief look at the ideological background of the government in power. At the outset, it is also important to understand that, within the broader category of Christianity, there are several sub-classifications in Eritrea, which include Orthodox Christianity, Catholicism, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and Evangelical, Protestant and Pentecostal denominations.

At the time of writing, none of the different variations of Christianity is safe from one or another form of government interference and abuse. A joint statement published in October 2014 by six ancient monasteries in Eritrea reveals that even the Eritrean Orthodox Church, which is sometimes seen as the 'most favoured' religion in the country, is heavily burdened by unwarranted government interference. In an unprecedented move, the six monasteries strongly denounce interference of some government agents in the spiritual mandate of the church, and call for the immediate removal of these government agents from all activities of the church. In a liturgical context, what they did was excommunication (*wgzet* in Tigrinya) of the said government appointees.<sup>13</sup>

Copyrighted Material

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, *Encyclopaedia Britannica* [online version], 'Mission': [www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/385426/mission](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/385426/mission) (accessed 18th October 2014).

<sup>13</sup> The excommunicated individuals are a secular appointee by the name Yuftahie Dimetros, who is 'administrator' of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, and a cleric named Priest Habtom Resom. See Radio Erena: 'Eritrean monasteries denounce government interference in church affairs' [original news items in Tigrinya]: <http://goo.gl/r5PnrV> (accessed 15th October 2014). The entire content of the joint letter of the six monasteries is available (in Tigrinya) at: <http://assenna.com/official-letter-written-by-the-eritrean-orthodox-churchesmonasteries-to-denounce-yeftahidemitros-and-habtom-russom>



In historical perspective, however, the earliest instance of religious persecution (as regards some segments of Christianity) dates back to the early 1990s. The best-known case is the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses. In 1993, when Jehovah's Witnesses refused to vote in the referendum for national independence and participate in an obligatory military service programme, which is a major component of the country's National Service Programme (NSP), the government responded by meting out some of the harshest punishments the country has ever seen in its post-independence history.

By an executive order issued by the state president on 25th October 1994, all Jehovah's Witnesses were prohibited from employment in the public sector, refused permission to engage in any commercial enterprise, and were deprived of the right to obtain relevant documentation such as national passport and identity papers. The suffering of some Jehovah's Witnesses is exceptionally heart-rending, as depicted in the following paragraph:

Three men, Paulos Eyassu, Isaac Mogos and Negede Teklemariam, have been in prison for conscientious objection to military service since 24th September 1994. Some Witness prisoners are held in metal shipping containers while others are in stone or metal buildings half-buried in the ground. One prisoner, Misghina Gebretinsae, aged 62, died in July 2011 because of extreme heat while in a punishment area described as the 'underground' in the Meitir Prison Camp. Yohannes Haile, aged 68, died on 16th August 2012, after almost four years of imprisonment in the Meitir Camp under similar conditions. A few Witness prisoners were released from the Meitir Camp after experiencing severe health issues.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to the above, the official website of Jehovah's Witnesses lists a total of seventy-three believers who are currently in detention without trial in Eritrea. Following the fate of some Jehovah's Witnesses, thousands of Eritreans from other religious denominations have been continuously persecuted by the Eritrean government on an alarming scale. Many of these violations are well documented by different sources, such as the annual or periodic reports of Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and other Eritrean and non-Eritrean rights groups.

Some of the well-known instances of religious persecution include continued attacks against minority religious groups that are not formally recognised by the state. Predominantly, these groups belong to the Eritrean Pentecostal movement. They practise their belief clandestinely at the risk of insurmountable levels of persecution; if caught practising their religion in whatever form, they are treated harshly. The persecution of these groups takes place mainly in the form of coerced repudiation of one's own religion. This is routinely accompanied by various forms of human rights violations such as prolonged arbitrary detention and solitary confinement,

<sup>14</sup> Jehovah's Witnesses, 'Imprisoned for their faith': [www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/eritrea/jehovahs-witnesses-in-prison](http://www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/eritrea/jehovahs-witnesses-in-prison) (accessed 17th October 2014).

including torture. In some extreme cases, it also entails extra-judicial execution. In this way, thousands of Eritrean have been victimised.

The main problem of the Eritrean government with the Pentecostal movements (or 'imported religious movements', as they are sometimes called) is that these movements are perceived as a threat to traditional hierarchies and sources of authority in the country. These movements are characterised by a robust activity of conversion and proselytising that includes a radical phenomenon of transformation. In the aftermath of the 1998-2000 border conflict with Ethiopia in particular, the Pentecostal movement in Eritrea successfully attracted the most conscious part of Eritrea's working and middle classes, which include young educated men and women, secondary school students and teachers, university students and professors, and other professionals.<sup>15</sup> The fact that this process of conversion takes place in the context of a conscious break with traditional practices is seen by the Eritrean government as a major threat to its authority and power base. Since it is a structure it cannot command, the government is prohibiting it and persecutes its followers.

In the eyes of the Eritrean government, a tendency to break away from established practices is also seen as one way of breeding dissent and spreading discontent within the larger Eritrean society and hence considered incompatible with the 'political culture' of the ruling elite (which is strongly influenced by a Marxist-Leninist tendency). This is evident, for example, from the statement of an army commander given in relation to a punishment meted out against a member of a Pentecostal movement:

As in North Korea, this type of religion [Pentecostalism] should never be allowed to spread in our country because this is a religion of the CIA and accordingly no one should be allowed to read and preach the Bible.<sup>16</sup>

This statement underscores the fact that religious persecution is perpetrated as a premeditated government policy focusing on certain categories of people. In addition to this, the growing attraction of Pentecostalism among Eritrea's middle class has also been deeply resented by the traditional Eritrean Orthodox Church,<sup>17</sup> which is sometimes seen as the most favoured, due – among other things – to its broad support base in the highland communities of Eritrea (the core base of the EPLF/PFDJ government).

Coupled with other sad stories of human rights' violations in Eritrea, the issue of religious persecution has now become one of the major reasons for the appointment of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human

<sup>15</sup> Abebe Kifleyesus, 'Cosmologies in collision: Pentecostal conversion and Christian cults in Asmara', in *African Studies Review* 49(1), (2006), 79–84.

<sup>16</sup> EriWengel.com, 'The story of Wedi Asmara in his own words', available at: [www.eriwengel.com/content/view/90/107/lang,en](http://www.eriwengel.com/content/view/90/107/lang,en) (accessed 22nd October 2007).

<sup>17</sup> Kifleyesus, 'Cosmologies in collision', 87.

Rights in Eritrea and the establishment of the UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Eritrea. Both fact-finding missions were initiated by the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in 2012 and 2014 respectively.

In the case of the COI, Eritrea has now become, to our knowledge, the first African country to be subjected to investigations of a commission of inquiry specifically mandated by the UN Human Rights Council. The only exception is the International Commission of Inquiry on Libya, which will be treated as a special case on the grounds that it was established during the height of the civil war in Libya, before the ousting of the Gadhafi regime. According to the established practice of UN fact-finding missions, commissions of inquiry are normally established in a situation that involves armed conflict. When the COI on Eritrea was established, there was no armed conflict in Eritrea. The fact that the COI was established under such unique circumstances speaks volumes about the gravity of the situation in Eritrea.

### **The Emergence of ‘Liberation Theology’**

The human rights abusing policies of the government have finally led to the development of organised civilian resistance – both in the form of civic action (such as the *Arbi Harnet* – Freedom Friday – network), but also articulated through religious means. The important development that needs to be highlighted here is what role Eritrean churches are playing in defying the prevalent despotism of the Eritrean government. Perhaps as a result of the dire state of religious persecution, which is part and parcel of the overall human rights crisis in Eritrea, there seems to be a new development in the country that comes in the form of a critical and open challenge targeting the Eritrean government itself. This phenomenon was observed in the context of a widely received *Pastoral Letter* of four Eritrean Catholic bishops that was circulated in May 2014.<sup>18</sup> This letter comes as the most critical public document to be published openly inside Eritrea since the 2001 dissent process.

In their letter, the Eritrean Catholic bishops did not address the problem of religious persecution directly. However, they discuss the debilitating socio-economic and politico-legal crisis in the country, which by implication is also a major cause of religious persecution. Calling for an urgent resolution of the crisis, the bishops caution that Eritrea as a nation would soon head toward a total *extinction* as a result of the growing level of

---

<sup>18</sup> Catholic Bishops of Eritrea, ‘Where is your brother?’ Pastoral Letter of 25th May 2014, 14 [emphasis added]. The Tigrinya version of the letter is available at: <http://asmarino.com/alewuna/2093-the-most-daring-message-to-come-out-of-eritrea-> (accessed 7th June 2014). An English translation is available at: <http://awate.com/pastoral-letter-a-complete-and-literal-translation> (translation by Semere T. Habtemariam), (accessed 19th June 2014).

mass exodus of the Eritrean people that has been witnessed in the last few years.

As is widely reported, Eritrea has now become one of the leading refugee-producing countries in the world, as a result of the dire state of human rights and the socio-economic crisis in the country. The Catholic bishops characterise this issue as a major threat to Eritrea's survival as a nation-state. The Tigrinya word they used in addressing this problem reads *tsanta*, which literally means *extinction*. They say: 'It is not just the continuous outflow, and hence the depletion, of the people on its own that is worrying us, but the fact that we are heading towards *extinction* as a result...' <sup>19</sup>

A very important aspect of the pastoral letter is that it can be likened, as is done by Girmay Negash, with the notion of Catholic 'liberation theology', as was widely experienced in a number of Latin American countries during the 1960s and 1970s. <sup>20</sup> In this context, liberation theology is understood as a version of Christianity that openly denounces instances of injustice of different sorts, from economic to political and other forms of injustice. In the pastoral letter, which has now become one of the most potent tools in the campaign against the Eritrean government, the Catholic bishops abhor the government's despicable record in all aspects of governance and the delivery of social services.

One clear example that shows the bishops' transformative aspiration is the claim which says: nation-states are established for the sake of their people, and not people for the sake of nation-states. <sup>21</sup> This argument finds itself in stark contrast with the long-held political line of the government, which propagates the primacy of 'national duties' over individual rights. In the government's rhetoric and practice, Eritrean citizens are not supposed to ask for the respect, protection and fulfilment of their basic rights before they fulfil their duties towards the state. Such duties often take the form of a one-way obligation without any form of reciprocity on the part of the state. The most abhorrent of such duties is the requirement of national service, which includes military service in the army for an unlimited period of time and without formal pay or salary. It is because of this abusive practice that many Eritreans, especially the youth, are fleeing the country on an unprecedented scale, thus prompting the Catholic bishops to lament as follows:

The prevailing conditions compel us to repeat what the church has said in 2001: 'There is no point in saying why our youth are focusing on going abroad. When we have a country full of peace, justice, work, freedom of expression, a country one could make a living in, there is no one who already

<sup>19</sup> Catholic Bishops of Eritrea 2014, 14 [emphasis added].

<sup>20</sup> Ghirmai Negash, 'The priests have spoken: Beginnings of liberation theology in Eritrea' [original text in Tigrinya], available at: <http://goo.gl/UyeCds>, accessed 23rd August 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Catholic Bishops of Eritrea 2014, 14.

has honey and may go looking for another honey; we will have our youth who do not long to go abroad, and we will have those who have left return home. The country was made for the people; and it is evident that people were not made for the country.<sup>22</sup>

With this kind of strong call for a meaningful political transformation, the pastoral letter has heralded the dawn of a new era, through the articulation of ‘liberation theology’. In what seems to be ‘following in the footsteps’ of the Catholic Church and, as noted before, six Eritrean ancient monasteries of the Orthodox Church have also published their own joint letter in October 2014, criticising government interference in the affairs of the church, and excommunicating two individuals who were seen as the implementers of unwarranted state interference.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to remember here that in August 2005, in an unprecedented violation in the history of the Eritrean Orthodox Church and in contravention of canonical laws, the government had dismissed the highest spiritual leader of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, Patriarch Abune Antonios. Following this, a new Patriarch was inappropriately appointed by the government on 27th May 2007. Seen against this background, and compared with the pastoral letter of the Catholic Bishops, the October 2014 statement of the monasteries is limited in scope and theme. However, it also comes as an unprecedented move in the history of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, thus strengthening our claim that Eritrea is indeed witnessing the emergence of a ‘liberation theology’, heralded by the Catholic Church, and emulated to a certain degree by the Orthodox Church. Only time will tell if the remaining religious groups in the country will follow suit.

### Concluding Remarks

In its short post-independence history of about two and a half decades, Eritrea has seen tremendous levels of human suffering that are, in many cases, hardly comparable (in severity) with any of its previous colonial experience. Indeed, as highlighted by a former senior government official, who left the regime several years after the political crackdown of 2001, the consequences of the government’s ‘utter disregard for the rule of law, its propensity for pervasive control, and general maladministration with respect to the well-being of the Eritrean people, are unprecedented’.<sup>24</sup> As already said, the issue of religious persecution (of Christians and non-Christians) is part and parcel of the overall political crisis in the country.

<sup>22</sup> Catholic Bishops of Eritrea 2014, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Eritrean Orthodox Church Monasteries (Radio Erena), 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Adebrihan Welde Giorgis, *Eritrea at Crossroads: A Narrative of Triumph, Betrayal and Hope* (Houston, TX: Strategic Book Publishing and Rights Co., 2014), 196-97.

What makes the case of Eritrea unique from many other countries is that it has no opposition political party. In fact, it is the only country in Africa ruled without any form of constitution or constitutional framework (be it a written or unwritten social contract). Since February 2002, the country has not had a functioning parliament either. Eritrea does not have a single privately owned media outlet; it suffers from a complete blackout of a free press. The judiciary is the most enfeebled of all state institutions in the country when it comes to the protection of fundamental rights and the restraining of government authority. As a state, Eritrea portrays unique characteristic features that make it a 'bizarre' example of statehood in the modern history of nation-states.

Eritrea's future, fraught with uncertainties, looks very challenging; but there are also hopes for a new beginning. To overcome the prevailing challenges, the country should come to terms with its egregious immediate past, which is marked by horrendous violations of human rights. In order to facilitate this, Eritrea needs, first and foremost, to transit itself as a matter of utmost urgency to an accountable (and with time, democratic) system of governance by ending the current pervasive culture of impunity. This will pave the way for a government that respects, protects and fulfils the fundamental rights of every citizen, including the right to freedom of belief. More than ever, the country also needs the support of the international community and regional actors to overcome these challenges. This can be attained, among other things, by exerting meaningful pressure on the Eritrean government with a view to transitioning the country to democratic order.

# THE SOMALI CONUNDRUM: CHRISTIAN PRESENCE IN TIMES OF PEACE AND IN TIMES OF TURBULENCE

David W. Shenk and Peter M. Sensenig

## Section One: Somali Hospitality and Mennonite Engagement (1952-69) by *David W. Shenk*

On 16th July 1962 my wife, Grace, collected the morning newspaper and read that Merlin Grove had been slain in Somalia. In a flash she sensed that God's appointment was for us to go to Somalia to replace Merlin and his family. A year later we left our home in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, with our two-year-old and two-month-old daughters to serve in Somalia under the Mennonite Board in East Africa.<sup>1</sup>

### *An Open Door in Somalia*

Just over two decades earlier, the general secretary of the Mennonite Board was reading the news while traversing Somalia on a flight from Ethiopia to East Africa. He read that the United Nations had determined that Northern Somalia was to become a British Trust Territory, and Southern Somalia an Italian Trust Territory. Looking out of the window at the acacia desert bushes where camels grazed in 1,000-mile annual circuitous routes, he determined that the Mennonite Board should investigate the possibility of entering Somalia as a mission amongst Muslims. He knew that all United Nations Trust Territories assured religious freedom. He felt some urgency to enter Somalia while the UNO held the door open.

Subsequently, a small Mennonite investigating team went to Somalia from Tanganyika. They met Somali and UNO officials. A welcoming hand was extended for a mission that would serve the people with medical and community development, and educational services. Catholics were already in Somalia serving the expatriate community. Shortly after the Mennonite Board team had arrived, the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) also entered. Both Protestant missions began educational programmes in Mogadishu,

---

<sup>1</sup> Our agency was then known as the Somalia Mennonite Mission (SMM) or Eastern Mennonite Mission (EMM). Later, the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) also entered Somalia as a partner with EMM. For the sake of conciseness, this essay will refer to the Mennonite presence in Somalia using the term Mennonite Board in East Africa (Mennonite Board).

and then expanded into the interior with service ministries that the authorities and local leaders wanted. Those were good years.

### *A Proud and Independent People*

In 1960 both Northern Somalia (British-administered) and Southern Somalia (Italian-administered) became independent and formed one united state called the Republic of Somalia. The Somali nation was the only African country united by one language; the nation was essentially 100% Muslim. With independence came the quest for the union of all Somali people into one nation within the entire eastern Horn of Africa. The flag of the Somali nation with its five-pointed star demonstrated the yearning for the eventual union of all Somalis into one nation consisting of Djibouti, the Ogaden (Ethiopia-administered), the Northern Frontier District (Kenya-administered), and a unified Northern and Southern Somalia.

During the next couple of decades that yearning for unified nationhood pushed Somalia into several wars for unification. The Somali people enjoyed their stories of warriors at war. Their favourite stories were about the warrior hero, Mohammed Abdullah Hassan, who from 1900 to 1920 kept the British on the run in Northern Somaliland. A third of the population died in those wars. Somalia has had a long legacy of insurgency against foreign interventions! Nevertheless, the 1960s were an era of considerable stability. The Somalis loved their democracy. Every evening in the tea shops, the men would debate with great gusto the speeches and manoeuvring in Parliament.

### *Seeking Space for a Christian Presence*

Why, then, was Merlin Grove slain in 1963 during this hopeful era in Somalia? During the first decade of the Mennonite Board and SIM presence in Somalia, there were occasional enquiries for Bible studies. These requests came especially from students. In time, some came to faith in Christ, and several were baptised quite secretly. One Friday, these believers in their exuberance for their newly-found faith in Christ, handed out Christian literature in the market adjacent to the central mosque. They did this right after the Friday noon prayers. There was a strong backlash, and the authorities felt compelled to close the Mennonite Board activities in Somalia.

The Muslim conviction is that the primary function of government is to protect the Muslim community.<sup>2</sup> Surely, in the mind of many Somali Muslims, the government had failed in its responsibility to protect Muslims from Christian influence. The assassin lived several hundred miles away,

---

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1969), 29.



but took it upon himself to travel a vast distance in order to take action against the Mennonite Board which he believed was a threat to the integrity of the Muslim community. He not only killed the director of the Mennonite Board, but he also attacked his wife who was severely knifed.

The government's directive to close the Mennonite Board ministries was not an easy decision. The schools and medical programmes of the mission were greatly appreciated. Parents of students strongly pressed the government to reopen the Mennonite Board schools.

The Somali nation was astonished when Merlin's widow sent a message to the court when the assassin was on trial. She wrote that her faith in Christ led her to forgive the assassin. That statement helped to cultivate renewed respect for the Mennonite Board. Consequently, after several months of closure, the authorities granted permission to reopen the mission, but with some restrictions.

The first restriction was prohibiting any proselytising. In line with that regulation, only the 'true religion' of Islam could be taught to the students. Prior to that, missionary teachers had sometimes announced in their English classes that students were welcome to attend Bible studies; the new regulations meant that had to stop.

The second restriction was that Islam had to be taught in all private schools. The government would provide teachers. The authorities promised to provide only wise teachers who would co-operate with the Mennonite Board.

That requirement was an enormous challenge to the North American Mennonites. However, by that time there were a number of fellowships of Somali believers in Jesus the Messiah. These believers were unanimous in recommending that the Mennonite Board comply with the requirements of the government. They observed that the Holy Spirit is not bound by the teaching of Islam. When the North American leaders heard the counsel of the Somali believers, they made a unanimous decision to submit to the counsel of the emerging church in Somalia.

That decision was significant in trust-building. The Somali people perceived that the mission was in Somalia to serve the people, not to oppose Islam. The SIM decided to close their schools rather than to permit the teaching of Islam. They continued with their medical programme, and many of the students in their programme transferred to Mennonite schools. Although both missions served with restrictions, there were, nevertheless, those who would come seeking to have a Bible study. Fellowships of believers emerged within the various locations where these respective missions served.

It was remarkable how much space there was for the emergence of a church when the Mennonite Board functioned unobtrusively and discreetly. On one occasion I addressed a top officer in the Ministry of Education, saying, 'I feel I should share with you how we function within the law prohibiting proselytising.'

He responded, 'Don't tell me. We trust you. Our plea is that you avoid making mistakes!'

This tolerant spirit is in harmony with a couple of injunctions from the Qur'an that Muslim colleagues often quoted as a guideline for their relationships with Christians. For example, in an endorsement of pluralist society we read: 'To each among you we prescribed a Law and an open way. If God has so willed, he would have made you a single people, but his plan is to test you in what he hath given you: so strive as in a race.'<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere we meet the famous dictum that proponents of religious freedom often quote: 'Let there be no compulsion in religion!'<sup>4</sup> This was expressed in practical ways. Very early on in the Muslim movement, the notion developed that in Muslim-governed regions, non-Muslim minorities should be protected, albeit with restrictions. That, in effect, is the way that society accommodated the presence of the Mennonite Board. We were a protected community, but needed to function with discretion and be respectful of the laws that related to minorities.

### *I Am Investigating!*

On one occasion I was called into the office of the District Commissioner. He said, 'I have heard that secretly you are enticing students to become Christians in the school you have developed. I am launching an investigation. I promise this will stop!'

I responded, 'I will not comment on whether students are becoming Christians. Only God knows the heart. Do your investigation. You will find that the mission respect the laws of the land. We do not invite Somalis to become Christians, but we do respond to initiatives and questions.'

'However, I need your advice. When I believed in Jesus the Messiah many years ago, the Spirit of God filled me with joy and love. I cannot destroy that gift. Students occasionally come to me saying they also want to believe in the Messiah as I have done. Can I deny them that gift? Has not God created us with the freedom to choose? What shall I do?'

He observed, 'You are right. I am a free man. Continue as you are doing. There will be no further investigation.'

Copyrighted Material

### *An Emerging Church in a Muslim Environment*

Somalis assume that they are a nation that is 100% Muslim. That reality is firmly established within the genealogical system, for many Somalis trace their genealogy back 25 or more generations to whom they believe is a descendant of Abraham. Somalis often comment that Islam flows in their veins, for they are true descendants of Muhammad. Thus the whole Somali

<sup>3</sup> Qur'an: 5:51.

<sup>4</sup> Qur'an: 2:256.

nation is genetically linked together within the grand Muslim family of faith, including Abraham!

Within that system there is very little space for church as an alternative to the Muslim *umma* – the universal Muslim community. The Somali conviction that they are genetically Muslim makes it quite challenging for a Somali to imagine identifying with an alternative people such as the church! That reality is reinforced by the Law of Apostasy that calls for retribution and even death for a Muslim who might leave Islam.<sup>5</sup> However, it is remarkable that Somali congeniality tolerated the emergence of small fellowships of believers in the Messiah in the locations where Mennonite Board appointees served.

Hospitality is a theme that runs very deeply within the Somali soul. The guest is welcome! The Mennonite Board consisted of people who were welcomed as guests. Grace and our children often walked through the village. Naughty boys sometimes hurled pebbles as they shouted, ‘Infidel!’ But that was not the mood in the village; their parents sharply reprimanded such discourtesy. Our family was welcomed as people would call for them to enter one home or another for a cup of tea. The Qur’an commands Muslims to compete with Christians in doing good. Hospitality is one way that the Somali Muslims competed with Christians.<sup>6</sup>

### *A Transforming Presence*

The Mennonite Board appointees were all recognised as People of the Book. That meant they were closest to Muslims in faith. Of course, there was always perplexity as well. Muslim Somalis found it difficult to understand why anyone would want to be a Christian, when, in their minds, Islam was obviously the final and true religion.

At the same time, there was admiration for the righteous lives of the Mennonite Board team, as well as respect for the life of worship and piety of the team. In due course, forty North Americans joined the team. They served in some seven locations. The respective teams met weekly for worship. Somalis discerned that their faith was foundational to their lives of service.

The schools that the Mennonite Board developed were especially appreciated for developing the foundations for modern secular education. The Mennonite Board developed two boarding schools. Students not only learned arithmetic, but they also learned to become friends across clan lines. That is the most enduring legacy of the Mennonite Board in Somalia. In fact, graduates of the mission schools were nicknamed the Muslim Mennonites. They were considered to be people of peace who had learned the art of wholesome inter-clan relationships.

---

<sup>5</sup> Qur’an: 4:89.

<sup>6</sup> Qur’an: 97:1-3.

A student said it this way, 'You have helped me see that the Christian faith is the faith for me. You worship God while serving humanity! You keep the two together.'

Somali leaders observed that the presence of the Mennonite Board schools was developing a generation of leaders who would salt the society with the values needed for a modern democracy to thrive.

### *Three Streams in Dynamic Engagement: Muslim, Somali, Christian*

There were several themes within the Somali culture that nurtured the social capital needed for the development of a healthy civic society. Noteworthy is Islam. Somali Islam as we experienced it is moderate. All Muslims belong to the universal Muslim community known as the *umma*. That community worships one God who is merciful and compassionate. There is a significant core commitment to God the compassionate, who cared for Muhammad when he was an orphan.

Interweaving with the themes of compassion within Islam there are also helpful peacemaking themes from traditional pre-Islamic society. Especially pertinent are the themes of forgiveness and hospitality. Traditional society is committed to cultivating covenant relationships known as *heer*. Such covenants are anchored in a commitment to preserve and restore relationships. In traditional society, *heer* is rooted in the God who blesses with peace. *Heer* is grounded in the tradition of restorative justice rather than retribution.

The Mennonites as a peace church are quite attracted to these peace themes in traditional Somali society. Very likely, this is a core reason that the Mennonite team and the Somalia community acquired such a keen appreciation for one another. The restorative themes in traditional society are more in harmony with biblical peace themes than was true of the more retributive inclinations within Islam.

### *The 1969 Thunderbolt*

The Somalis loved their democracy. Theirs was an exuberant, albeit corrupt, democracy. Every election saw a grand sweep of incumbents, including the ousting of an incumbent president. Then in 1969 all that changed. Late in the evening of 21st October, I drove into Mogadishu, observing that I was the only vehicle on the streets. Armed soldiers frantically waved me off the road. Inadvertently I had broken curfew. A Russian-built tank clanked into the driveway entrance of the Mennonite Board compound. A Soviet-orchestrated communist coup was under way. President Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke was assassinated.

The Soviet intervention was baldly Marxist. Overnight, a KGB form of spy network entangled the whole country. Public executions of so-called counter-revolutionaries commenced with amazing speed. A military officer,

Mohamed Siad Barre, seized power as he announced that Somalia was now a Marxist-Leninist state governed by the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The executions shredded the delicate weavings of inter-clan relationships that had so characterised the first decade of Somali parliamentary democracy. Retribution and revenge replaced conciliation and the traditional theme of restorative justice. For the next 21 years, an autocratic president ruthlessly imposed his will upon the Somali people.

Early on, as the revolution progressed, a letter from the government came our way. It said, 'Thanks for your service. Good bye!'

The departure of the forty appointees of the Mennonite Board from Somalia was a four-year process. It was not the Muslims who demanded that we left. Rather, it was a secular government powerfully controlled by the Soviet system. Subsequently, for some years, the Somali believers' fellowships as well as all Mennonite Board commitments were framed within the reality of the Marxist revolution. The social fabric has seemed hopelessly frayed as civil war and foreign interventions have contributed to what has been a tragic disintegration of the social capital of traditional society.<sup>7</sup> The revolution carelessly squandered the precious heritage of collegial hospitality. The gun replaced the pen.

In the midst of the winds of disintegration, the Mennonite presence has persisted, often within countries on the periphery, such as Kenya. That presence is recognised throughout the region as a presence for peace. A Christian Somali peace emissary, Ahmed Ali Haile, has for many years been a voice and a presence for peace.<sup>8</sup> He has served within multiple interventions in the Somali context. The remainder of this paper will provide an assessment of these interventions and the implications for Christian presence and peacemaking.

## **Section Two: Christian Presence in an Era of Turbulence and Interventions (1969-2014) by Peter M. Sensenig**

The story of religious freedom in Somalia since 1950 is one of steady decline, facilitated by four developments in particular. First, the religious freedom clause in the Somali Constitution was amended in 1963, rendering illegal the propagation of any religion other than Islam. Second, the 1969 Marxist coup described above established scientific socialism under the dictator Mohamed Siad Barre and placed both Muslim and Christian groups at odds with the government. Third, the collapse of the central government in 1991 ushered in chaos in which the small number of Somali Christians experienced heightened persecution. And finally, multiple western

<sup>7</sup> James S. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1990), 300-21.

<sup>8</sup> Ahmed Ali Haile, *Teatime in Mogadishu, My Journey as a Peace Ambassador in the World of Islam* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald, 2011), 17-127.

interventions up to the present time have hardened anti-Christian sentiment in the country, the effect of which is the decimation of the Somali church and the severe restriction of mission activities.

### *Religious Freedom under Dictatorship, 1969-91*

The political climate under General Barre was such that any perceived opposition was not tolerated. Even after Somalis had long tired of his regime, he succeeded in suppressing the opposition. Massive demonstrations of military power masked the regime's constant fear that it could be deposed, just as had done to the previous administration in the 1969 coup. In such an atmosphere, anything secret is suspicious, because much information is transferred in clandestine ways. It was therefore in part a pragmatic decision for the Mennonite Board not to engage in secret activities, for the safety of both the missionaries and the Somalis with whom they interacted. The operating assumption was that Somalis would see through attempts to hide anything. The decision was not always easy, but the mission's policy of openness with the Somali government built the necessary trust for a relationship to continue.

As the regime nationalised the country's schools and hospitals, the Mennonite Board was forced to register with the government. A long-time Somali friend of the Mennonite Board assisted with the paperwork and ensured that the registration was approved at the Ministry of Education. He confided in a mission leader that Somali government officials were much more concerned about the increasing influence of conservative Islamic groups, such as the growing number of Saudi-funded Wahhabi schools, than they were about the Mennonites, whom they already knew. Nevertheless, the last Mennonite Board workers were dismissed from the country in 1976.

By the 1980s, when the Mennonite Board was invited by the government to return, the country was rapidly deteriorating. There was more thievery and crime. People were imprisoned or even executed if they opposed Barre. For the missionaries, the situation changed as government favour swung from the West to the Soviet Union and back again. For Somali Christians, there was no such pendulum swing, only an increase in persecution. In the years following the mid-1970s, the situation became steadily more perilous for Somali Christians. The 1980s was already a period in which confessing Christ usually meant social alienation, persecution, and even death. But the worst was still to come: in the lawlessness following the collapse of the government, many Somali believers lost their lives at the hands of militant Islamists.

### *Civil War, External Interventions, and al-Shabaab*

The Somali government collapsed in January 1991, and rival warlords from the same clan battled for control of the capital. Although the Mennonite Board was forced to pull its personnel from Somalia, it remained present with the Somali people, opening an office in Kenya to stay connected with refugees and believers, as well as to issues with education, development and peace.<sup>9</sup> Representatives of the Mennonite Board made frequent trips to Somalia in order to arrange for nurses to serve in the region during ceasefires, and to attend meetings of clan elders, women, and others who were reaching across clan lines to discuss peace.<sup>10</sup> Relief and development work continued with great care to provide equal aid to various groups, so as not to aggravate inter-clan tension or conflict.<sup>11</sup> Mennonite service to Somalis extended even to the diaspora, helping with immigration, settlement, and advocacy in North America.

The US and UN engaged in repeated humanitarian intervention in the early 1990s. The success or failure of these endeavours is difficult to measure objectively, especially because such humanitarian intervention included a wide and diverse range of activities. The limited scope and goals of US-led Unified Task Force (UNITAF, also known in the US as Operation Restore Hope) have led some to label it a success in feeding starving people, since its stated objective was not state-building or wide-reaching security in the country. The United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) II is widely considered to have been a failure because it fell short of establishing security or a functioning government by the time of its withdrawal in 1995.

In recent years, much of the repression of religious minorities in Somalia has been at the hands of the militant group al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab has aligned itself with al-Qaeda and claims responsibility for incidents of terror in the region, including the September 2013 attacks in a Nairobi shopping mall and assassinations of political and civic leaders. The group has controlled large portions of southern and central Somalia, including lucrative port cities and areas of the capital.

How does a society with a long history of moderate Sufism, including a religious freedom clause in its original Constitution, become a hotbed of militant ideology in a matter of decades? The iron hand of Barre, the civil

<sup>9</sup> Bertha Beachy, 'The Somali Journey: Presence and Patience', in *Anabaptists Meeting Muslims: A Calling for Presence in the Way of Christ*, James R. Krabill, David W. Shenk and Linford Stutzman (eds), (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2005), 238.

<sup>10</sup> Omar Eby, *Fifty Years, Fifty Stories: The Mennonite Mission in Somalia, 1953-2003* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2003), 86, 92.

<sup>11</sup> John Paul Lederach, 'Mennonite Central Committee Efforts in Somalia and Somaliland', in *From the Ground Up: Mennonite Contributions to International Peacebuilding*, ed. Cynthia Sampson and John Paul Lederach (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 141-142.

war, and external intervention, all played a role in the devolution of religious freedom in Somalia.

The abuse of power in the Barre regime was so great that it cultivated a deep distrust of centralised authority. When his government fell, Somalis turned to Islamic revival in lieu of a centralised government. In the mid-2000s an alternative movement called the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) managed to bring relative peace to war-torn Somalia, reducing weaponry and even clamping down on piracy off the coast. The ICU had legitimacy in the eyes of the Somali people because it was perceived as a grassroots movement that was successful in bringing about some stability.

But the US did not trust the ICU, which included both moderate and radical elements. The US hired warlords in Mogadishu to kill and capture suspected al-Qaeda operatives. The ICU opposed these US-supported warlords. Furthermore, neighbouring Ethiopia feared that Somalia might be reuniting under a powerful Islamic movement. On Christmas Eve 2006, a coalition of US and Ethiopian forces rolled into Somalia in tanks, killing rather than capturing both ICU leaders and civilians.

The invasion by Ethiopia and the US achieved the opposite of its intended outcome. The annihilation of the Islamic Courts Union all but destroyed the moderate presence in Somalia, radicalising both the religious and political leadership and the general population. In the wake of the ICU's demise, al-Shabaab was formed, and aligned itself with al-Qaeda. In short, the US played a major part in the creation of al-Shabaab.

Both the invasion and the Bush administration's policies in Somalia, including supporting notorious warlords and launching Tomahawk missile strikes against civilians, were a complete backfire. The battle for the hearts and minds of Somalis was lost, allowing al-Qaeda to plant a friendly flag among a population increasingly willing to side with anyone against the barbarity of the West. The long hatred for the Ethiopians (and subsequently Christians) was rekindled, accompanied by widespread sentiment regarding the thousands of dead Somalis, including many civilians, that 'Muslims wouldn't do anything like this'.<sup>12</sup> The US and its allies had ushered in the enemy they had claimed to be destroying. Somalia was back to square one, beset with insecurity and anarchy, with virtually no possibility for a Christian presence.

Just as tragically, the invasion and overthrow of the ICU was a lost opportunity for peacemaking. If the international community had recognised that the ICU was a genuine grassroots form of government with broad support from the Somali people, the focus could have turned to peace-building strategies rather than the endless tasks of state-building. It was an ideal moment to construct a genuinely Somali, bottom-up government, a moment that was utterly squandered by the Bush

---

<sup>12</sup> Eliza Griswold, *The Tenth Parallel: Dispatches from the Fault Line between Christianity and Islam* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 130.



administration's war on terror, which painted all kinds of Islamic organisations with broad and often deeply mistaken brushstrokes. The lesson of previous military actions in Somalia – including the famous Black Hawk Down events – was still not learned: Somalis unite against foreign military intervention, to the benefit of groups like al-Shabaab and to the detriment of religious freedom.

*Ahmed Ali Haile, Somali Christian Peacemaker*

By contrast with the failed strategies of military intervention, peacemaking that has a lasting impact on Somali society and increases the prospects for religious diversity will rely heavily on traditional Somali mechanisms for the transformation of conflict. Ahmed Ali Haile, a Somali Christian peacemaker, served as an ambassador for peace as he crossed borders of many kinds – cultural, religious, and geographical. As a peacemaker committed to Christ, he actively explored the possibilities and limitations of clan identity, Somali culture and traditions, and the religious resources for peace. His willingness to risk his own life for the sake of peace demonstrates the costliness, but also the fruit, of a bottom-up approach.

Born and raised in a Muslim context in Bullo Burte, Somalia, Haile became a Christian at age of seventeen. For Haile, identifying with Jesus and the church meant no longer identifying with the mosque. Yet he resolved never to speak ill of Islam, because Islam had prepared him to meet Jesus and planted in him the desire for God that was fulfilled in Jesus, and for community that was fulfilled in the church, which Haile compared with a spiritual house such as an *udub*, a traditional Somali hut.<sup>13</sup>

Shunned by members of his own clan and threatened by the Somali authorities, Haile struggled with his identity as a Somali Anabaptist follower of Jesus. He continued to seek inclusion among his fellow Somalis, sustained by his conviction that Jesus' disciples are called to reflect the incarnational presence of Christ. As the political situation unravelled, Haile's calling to be an ambassador of the Gospel of peace brought him back to Somalia again and again.

In 1991 Haile was called by Somali colleagues, under the auspices of the newly-formed inter-clan peace group *Ergada* (which was sponsored by Mennonite Board), to return to Somalia for two weeks of peacemaking work, especially between the divided factions of the United Somali Congress (USC). *Ergada* requested his presence at this volatile time for a number of reasons. Haile had shared a vision with *Ergada* of a just, peaceful Somali state built on good clan relations, which he saw as the only possibility for a functioning government. He was recognised both for his boldness in engaging the clan system and for his abilities in mediation, and he had master's degrees in peace studies and public administration.

---

<sup>13</sup> Haile and Shenk, *Teatime in Mogadishu*, 34-37.

Additionally, Haile was from the Karanle sub-clan of the Hawiye clan. The chief antagonists in the fighting, interim president Ali Mahdi and General Farah Aidid, were both also from the Hawiye clan. According to Somali tradition, the Karanles are considered the elder siblings within the Hawiye clan, and they play a key role in settling disputes.<sup>14</sup> These qualities, both of pedigree and personality, put Haile in a unique peacemaking position. He served as the only Christian on a team of Muslims. Of his Muslim companions, Haile states, 'We were joined by a love for our people, believing that something stronger than guns could bring peace.'<sup>15</sup>

In his peacemaking work, Haile engaged all the tools he could find: pre-Islamic systems of justice, colonial courts and laws, the *qadi* and *shari'a* courts, and social sciences. More than only peacemaking theories, they were the fundamental tools for acting in the midst of tremendous challenges and resistance, such as the imam who called for his execution for apostasy but who later became his protector.

As Haile was attending a negotiation near the fighting zones in Mogadishu in January 1992, the house where the meeting took place was attacked by Aidid's forces. Haile's leg was severely wounded in the attack and was later amputated. Yet he continued to be involved in peacemaking among his Somali people, in Somalia, Kenya and North America. Haile taught for years at Daystar University in Nairobi, where he founded a peace studies programme. He also helped to lead the growing Somali Christian community in the Nairobi suburb of Eastleigh, driven by a vision for a thriving Somali fellowship. Haile also gathered Muslim and Christian scholars together to read and discuss their scriptures.

Haile died of cancer in 2011, but the fruit of his life continues in both Africa and North America. His memoir was released just days after his death. It is now available in several languages, including Somali.

### Conclusion: Signs of Hope

Ahmed Haile's life embodied an alternative to the strong-armed approach to peace-building and forceful imposition of religion or ideology in Somalia. Although Christians and other religious minorities have suffered greatly, there are signs of hope. In 2008, Mennonites and Somalis co-founded an institute for peace and conflict studies at a university in Somaliland. At this institute, students from various parts of the Somali region study the power of non-violent strategies, conflict transformation, and trauma healing. It is in places like this that the futility of both military intervention and militant Islamism are laid bare. This – not the barrel of a rifle or a tank – is the real battlefield against the ideology of al-Shabaab,

<sup>14</sup> Eby, *Fifty Years, Fifty Stories*, 94.

<sup>15</sup> J. Nelson Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics, and Devotion in the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2010), 96.

religious intolerance, and the cycles of violence that have gripped Somalia for decades. Authentic peacemakers within the Somali conundrum are drawing upon peacemaking resources that are especially attuned to the approaches to peacemaking that have characterised the traditional covenantal systems. Restorative justice is paramount.

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

## **RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND CHRISTIAN MISSION: PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA**

Kim-kwong Chan<sup>1</sup>

In the 1950s, the newly established People's Republic of China had undergone a socialist transformation of Chinese society where atheism became the dominating ideology and the Communist Party was the only legal party. One of the social programmes was the nationalisation of all private sectors and the de-westernisation of all institutions. Further, the government established a special ministry department to oversee religion and formulate policy to ensure religious groups were supportive of the building of a new socialist Chinese society. Under this new policy, the Chinese churches were to cut off links with the West and join the only government-sanctioned Protestant organisation: the Chinese Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement, commonly known as Three-Self or TSPM. Those churches that joined this movement were considered patriotic and allowed to operate openly, but were subjected to strong political control by the government. They were commonly known as the Three-Self Churches. Those that refused to join were subjected to forced closure, their leaders were jailed, and their activities were charged as being illegal and often as anti-revolutionary. In the late 1950s, all Protestant churches in China were 'united' as a non-denominational community under the umbrella of TSPM. From the late 1950s to mid-1960s, the number of functioning TSPM churches was drastically reduced. Since 1966, with the launching of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, even the then-tolerated TSPM churches were closed and all religious activities ceased under the new policy of total eradication of religion. The Christian population dropped from one million in 1950 to almost nil in 1967 (at least on paper) as Christianity had been harshly suppressed and religious freedom was denied.

It was not until 1979 that the government relaxed its social policy, including allowing religion to re-surface. The government also formulated a policy to establish the social and political parameters under which religion might exist. There is religious freedom in China but with a different understanding and connotation from what has been understood in the West. Furthermore, Christianity is but one of several major religious groups in China and perhaps the newest entry into this ancient civilisation. Since the 1980s, Christianity has grown at an astonishing rate, from a

---

<sup>1</sup> The Rev Judy Chan has read this chapter and corrected many mistakes to make it more readable.

handful to tens of millions, despite the rather limited freedom of religion. This paper intends, first, to outline the current government's policy on religion vis-à-vis religious freedom; second, to describe the current status of Christianity in China under such policy; and third, to discuss the missiological implications.

### **The Policy of Religious Freedom in China<sup>2</sup>**

The Constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC) states that all citizens have the right to believe, or not to believe, in religion. The very same Constitution affirms that the Communist Party of China (CPC), as the only ruling party, governs China with Communist ideology, and that Marxism-Leninism is the state orthodoxy of PRC; so atheism, rather than religious belief, is the official ideology which dominates all public institutions, including all schools and mass media. Consequently, religion in China lives under the dominance as well as at the mercy of atheism. There have even been times in the history of the PRC when religion was targeted for eradication since religion was regarded as a hindrance to the establishment of a socialist society, such as during the era of the Cultural Revolution (1966-77). Since the 1980s China adopted the Open and Reform Policy to gradually embrace capitalism as well as a more tolerant society for diverse expressions. The CPC has since formulated a policy of 'Freedom of Religious Belief' to define the role, function and space that religion can occupy within Chinese society and the government has a special unit to implement such policy. Since the 1980s the state's position towards religion has gradually changed from religion being seen as 'the opiate of the people' that needed to be repudiated, and an outdated cultural relic that needed to be isolated, to the current position where religion is viewed as a part of human civilisation with potential contributions towards social and economic development, but one that needs to be guided. The following are the main tenets of this religious policy.

First, the Chinese government assumes the authority to define not only what religion is, but also which religions are accepted and which are not. It officially recognises five major religions in China – Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism. There are also other religions, smaller ones or the new entries, which the government also recognises, such as the Orthodox Church, the Baha'i, the LDS Church (Mormons), and

---

<sup>2</sup> The following section in this chapter gives a very condensed version of the religious policy of China. For a more comprehensive understanding of this policy, along with the relevant regulations, see Kim-kwong Chan and Eric R Carlson, *Religious Freedom in China: Policy, Administration, and Regulation – A Research Handbook* (Santa Barbara, CA: Institute for the Study of American Religion, 2005). One can also visit the website for SARA (the State Administration for Religious Affairs) which contains all the policy papers and regulations of the Chinese government: [www.sara.gov.cn](http://www.sara.gov.cn)

local folk religions, such as Shamanism and Mazu, etc. The government also acknowledges religions, such as Judaism, mostly among expatriates, and allows them to operate in China.<sup>3</sup> Further, the Chinese authorities have identified more than a dozen religious groups as evil cults targeted for suppression, such as Falun Gong, and The Church of the Almighty God.<sup>4</sup>

Second, the government also assumes the authority to dispense rights to its people, including religious freedom. It is understood that Chinese citizens receive religious rights, not as something that is instilled at birth, but rather as a gift at the discretion and mercy of the Chinese government. The government can take it away when relations between the people and the government change. Therefore the government serves as the dispenser, regulator and protector of religious rights in China.

Third, religious activity is under the control and supervision of the government. In order to exist in China legally, a religious group has to be affiliated with one of the government-recognised religious organisations, namely, the Buddhist Association of China, the China Daoist Association, the China Islamic Association, the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, the Chinese Catholic Bishops' College, and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee of the Protestant Churches of China/China Christian Council. All these religious organisations are supervised by the government, and their mandates are to self-regulate religious affairs within their religion, to guide their believers to support the government, and to implement the government's political objectives within their corresponding religion. Religious activities are allowed within designated religious venues under the auspices of these organisations. The government has a special apparatus to oversee these religious organisations.

Fourth, religion is regarded as a private and personal matter. The religious policy in China is the freedom of religious belief, not freedom of religion. This expression suggests that religion is regarded as a personal matter for the individual person. As religion is a private matter, the state does not interfere in what one believes or does not believe. However, religion should not have any social or collective influence in society; religions are not allowed to interfere with the government's social, education and marriage policies. The activity of religious groups is confined within a particular space and time, and there is a clear separation between religious space and public space.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> In 2011, SARA established a separate Directorate (Fourth) to deal with religions other than those five major ones.

<sup>4</sup> The official document on Evil Cults by the Public Security Bureau: [www.china21.org/docs/CONF1-MPS-CHINESE.htm](http://www.china21.org/docs/CONF1-MPS-CHINESE.htm)

<sup>5</sup> Apparently, the campaign in Zhejiang to remove the cross from church buildings in 2014 seems to fall under this category as the sign of the cross intrudes into public space. For more details of this incident, see: [www.chinaaid.org/2014/10/zhejiang-demolitions-cross-destruction.html](http://www.chinaaid.org/2014/10/zhejiang-demolitions-cross-destruction.html)

Fifth, freedom of religious belief is enjoyed only by a citizen with full political rights. Since the right to believe or not to believe is granted only to citizens with full political rights, those who are stripped of political rights, such as prisoners under sentence by the court, or minors, do not have such a right. For example, prisoners in China have no religious rights, and the Chinese correctional service has no chaplaincy service. Further, minors (under 18 years of age) are not allowed to receive religious instruction; in that way, they will not be denied the right to choose to believe in religion or not when they become adults. It implies that one cannot proselytise among children. Although in most localities the officials would turn a blind eye to children's ministry, such as Sunday School, the Sunday Schools operated on Sunday are often technically called nurseries for children while the adults are attending worship; infant baptism is not allowed in China since this infringes on the right of a citizen to choose their religion.

Sixth, Communist party members cannot be adherents of any religion. It is obvious that, since a Chinese Communist party member has to make an oath to affirm atheism in order to join the CPC, a party member cannot embrace any form of theism or religious faith unless he/she renounces their party membership. As there are more than 80 million CPC members in China and most of them hold government jobs, virtually all the officials in China are party members. That means no religion formally exists within the government apparatus. Furthermore, the military forces in China – the People's Liberation Army, the Armed Police, and the Production and Construction Corporation, along with their schools, hospitals and factories – are military forces which are not part of the Chinese government, but part of the CPC which embraces atheism. Thus no religion is allowed to exist within the military and its affiliated institutions, affecting several tens of millions of people.

Seventh, national minority groups enjoy special privileges in religion if a group regards a particular religion as its cultural identity, such as Uyghur and Islam, or Tibetan and Buddhism. Should that be the case, this minority group can have much wider latitude to practise religion, often at the expense of other religious groups. For example, since the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is populated by mostly Uyghur who embrace Islam, Islam has primacy among other religions. Other religions such as Christianity are denied even their limited rights, such as registration with the authorities or organising a provincial Christian body.

Eighth, foreigners (foreign passport holders, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan citizens, and Chinese nationals living abroad visiting China) in China come under a separate ruling. They are allowed to have their own sanctioned religious activities in approved venues. Even religions outside the five officially accepted major religions, such as Judaism, are allowed under this category. However, foreigners' religious activities cannot involve local nationals, and a valid ID or passport is often needed in order

to gain access to these religious activities. Contacts between foreign and national religious groups require prior approval from the civic authorities.

Ninth, no foreigner is allowed to proselytise in China, and no foreign religious institution can establish branches in the country. Basically, all missionary activity by foreigners is forbidden: religion in China has to be operated by nationals. In other words, no foreign religious authority can operate in China since Chinese religious groups simply do not recognise foreign religious authority in China.

All these nine elements of the religious policy effectively confine religion in China to a well-regulated social and political space which contains religious activities as a private matter as well as a Chinese domestic issue, and constrains religious influence within a defined scope favourable to the political objective of the government. Any attempt to breach these parameters is illegal and suppressed by the government. A cursory reading of this policy would suggest that such draconian measures could easily suffocate religion. However, the reality suggests otherwise as all religions in China appear to be growing in an astonishing way with various ingenious means to circumvent official policy. It is like the political system in China known as 'Socialism with Chinese characteristics': being one of the most capitalistic markets in the world, yet claiming itself as the largest socialist country.

### **The Status of Christianity in China since 1980**

The government relaxed its religious policy in 1980 as part of the national Reform and Open Policy; it allowed the reappearance of the TSPM, returned some of the closed church buildings, and urged Christians to form a parallel organisation with TSPM called the China Christian Council which, together with TSPM, are known as the 'two organisations' (*Lianghui*) or TSPM/CCC.<sup>6</sup> The TSPM/CCC have gained momentum in reopening churches and re-establishing seminaries and Bible schools, reprinting the Bible and hymnals, and have established nationwide organisational structures with branches in almost all provinces, municipalities, prefectures and counties. It has also established links with the global Christian community by joining the World Council of Churches (in 1993), and by participating in the Global Christian Forum. It also participates in ecumenical affairs. In 1979, there were just a handful of reopened churches, but 35 years later, the current membership in TSPM/CCC numbers more than 26 million gathering at about 60,000 churches/meeting points with 21 Bible schools and hundreds of regional training centres. More than 70 million copies of the Bible have been

---

<sup>6</sup> It has a website detailing their operations: [www.ccetspm.org](http://www.ccetspm.org)



printed,<sup>7</sup> and there are many active Christian publishers. A church hierarchy with an established Church polity and regulations effectively connects these tens of thousands of TSPM/CCC churches into one single bloc of Christian community – perhaps the largest single bloc of Christians in China.

There is much diversity within the TSPM/CCC, yet they are basically registered with the government although their relations with the government vary from friendly to hostile, but it nevertheless remains a working relationship. Their activities are all regulated by the local authorities and their restrictions vary, largely depending on the local authorities' attitude towards Christianity. Many of these TSPM/CCC churches also run house gatherings for various reasons: insufficient space in the church building and geographically a greater convenience to meet in homes for Christians who are living far away from the church venue; for some this is a long ecclesial tradition. Also many of these house gatherings operated by TSPM/CCC are not registered, hence are technically illegal but commonly acknowledged as a reality.<sup>8</sup> There are many churches which are in the long process of registration and have received a provisional status, especially those newly established communities in areas where hitherto no Christian church had existed. They would not be totally legal but not entirely illegal either. There are also many Christian communities which are formally registered with the government but without being part of the TSPM/CCC network, such as the churches in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. There are Christian groups under the government's supervision, such as the churches in Kashgar, but the government denies their formal existence. Within the legal framework of China, it is suggested that there are vast grey areas between registered TSPM/CCC, registered Christian groups, and non-registered Christian groups, and many officially acknowledged groups are still living on the fringes of the law. Therefore the amount of religious liberty that a Christian community can enjoy is really rather elastic and dynamic, and depends more on the actual situation of a locality than on the official framework of religious freedom.

Since the mid-1950s some Christians have continued to gather together in secret, often in family households retaining the most basic form of Christian activities such as prayer, Bible study and hymn-singing. They were often referred to as house gatherings. At the end of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s, some of these household gatherings became more visible and gradually came to be referred to as House Churches. They form the bulk of the non-registered sector of Christianity in China. Their situation is equally, if not more, complex than that of the registered groups. In the early 1980s, many of the Christians who survived as remnants from

<sup>7</sup> See: [www.ccctspm.org](http://www.ccctspm.org), the official website of TSPM/CCC. However, the statistics are rather murky as the latest update on church statistics was in 2011.

<sup>8</sup> This writer had spoken to a pastor at a provincial capital TSPM/CCC church who said that they report to the government that they ran seven house gatherings under this church. He added that they in fact ran 21 gatherings.

harsh suppression by the government opted not to join the newly re-established TSPM/CCC. They felt that if they could keep their faith even during the most difficult trials, why would they need to compromise their stance by going under the wings of the TSPM/CCC that had once allied with the government to suppress them? Furthermore, since they lived out their faith in the households without the need to establish any separate venue, such as a church building, there was really no need to change from this ecclesial mode. Gradually, some house gathering-based groups had begun to form alliances with many like-minded groups to establish their own regional and even nationwide networks. They are, theologically speaking, autonomous Christian communities (ACC).<sup>9</sup>

In the 1980s some revivals took place in rural regions such as Henan and Anhui provinces. These ACC in rural regions swelled their ranks manifold and their house gatherings could no longer take on such large numbers. While splitting into more groups, some began to meet at specially constructed buildings or they dedicated buildings for such purposes, such as an old barn or storage house. However, as a convention, it is still referred to as House Church or Family Church even though many of the meetings are practically no longer taking place in someone's home or house. This type of ecclesial community has flourished all over China. Similar developments have also taken place in urban areas. The 'house church' in urban settings would have a smaller size on average than their counterparts in the rural areas for obvious issue of space. However, there is a growing trend that some of these groups rent commercial properties and can house more than a thousand people worshipping together under its own name and with comprehensive administrative structures, but they are still referred to as 'house churches'.

Since the 1980s, there have been many splits and divisions among these ACC due to theological differences, leadership conflicts and personality tensions; all add to the diverse development of this ecclesial movement both in strength and in variety. Since these ACC do not fall under the supervision of the civic authorities like the TSPM/CCC does, they can have a high degree of flexibility and mobility in their expansion, training and recruitment. Also they have lower overheads for maintenance as they usually do not need church buildings which might otherwise drain a lot of financial resources. Very often, a zealous Christian who evangelised a few dozen friends, relatives and neighbours would naturally form such gatherings which eventually evolved into a 'house church'. If such a Christian is affiliated to a larger group, or to one that he or she used to belong to, this new group becomes part of a larger network. Some are Christians converted while overseas who gather together after they return to China as they would not fit in with the TSPM/CCC or traditional family

---

<sup>9</sup> Alan Hunter and Kim-kwong Chan, *Protestantism in Contemporary China* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 66-107.

church networks. These overseas returnee churches are on the rise since more Chinese are returning from overseas after their studies with increasing opportunities for them back in China. These ACC can be anything from a few dozen believers to a few hundred Christians, mostly converted by their self-appointed leaders. Many of these ACC would also launch mission or church-planting programmes, hence giving rise to new communities.

Although there is no accurate survey or statistics on the number of Christians in the ACC, its numbers vary from just a few million, according to TSPM/CCC, to as much as several tens of millions, according to others. Some larger networks claim to have membership of several million under their jurisdiction. The extreme difference in number suggests the complex and controversial nature of the ACC as most of the information is from perhaps over-zealous or over-cautious leaders. Further, intense rivalry between ACC and TSPM/CCC and among ACC leaders may somewhat distort the image of these ACC. Regardless of the controversy over the size of ACC, it is a fact that ACC is a very vibrant part of Christianity in China and it basically lives beyond the parameters established by the authorities, a situation the government seems to tolerate.

These ACC have many things in common: they are not under the direct supervision of the Religious Affairs Bureau, they are not bound by church polity, they are mostly led by leaders with charisma, they are flexible, they are hidden from the public domain, they stress the separation between church and state and the non-submission of the church to the civic authorities; they are composed of many groups, alliances and networks, and they are dynamic and fluid. Usually they identify with their leaders or the special gifts and teachings that their leaders deliver, somewhat similar to denominationalism with a distinct theological slogan or practices, albeit in a less developed form. Although ACC have no legal status and are not under the control of the government, they are not really hidden from it, as there are no secrets in China. In fact, most of the ACC, just like every sphere of livelihood in China, would be under the monitoring system of the Public Security apparatus, and there would also be informants from ACC to report on their activities to the authorities.

Other than the TSPM/CCC and ACC, there are some peculiar ecclesial groups in China, such as those 'hidden' followers of Christ. Since the ruling party in China is the Chinese Communist Party – with more than 80 million members – which adopts atheism as state orthodoxy, those who serve in public institutions, usually party members, would usually be discriminated against if they accepted and openly practised religion. Therefore those who are party members, military personnel, government officials, and those who serve in public institutions such as schools or hospitals, would not openly admit their religious belief, nor would they openly attend religious activities until after their retirement, or they would have to suffer severe consequences. Many of these people, who have accepted Christ and become Christ-followers, would not accept baptism

and would avoid public Christian activities. Some of these intellectuals and business people would identify themselves as 'Cultural Christians', but not Christians. This type of Christ-follower is ecclesially not part of the church and sacramentally not a Christian. However, they are part of the Christian phenomenon in China, a powerful one indeed, as many of them are the social elite in political, commercial, military, and intellectual arenas, bearing great influence. Many, in their official capacity, grant favours to the church.

There is also a type of Christian community that embraces Christianity as their ethnic identity. There are 55 official recognised ethnic minority groups in China with perhaps hundreds of sub-groups living alongside the majority Han people. Some of these groups, such as the Miao, Lahu, Va, Lisu and Jingpo, were exposed to Christian missionary work and already received much Christian influence before 1949. Many of these groups even owed their language to Christian missionaries as it was the missionaries who had developed the script, along with the translation of the Bible into it, as well as the introduction of modern education, medicine and other technologies to these groups. Also, Christian conversion among these people is often of a communal rather than an individual nature. Therefore it is not uncommon for entire villages to become Christian. The Chinese government has a separate policy, as well as ministry, for ethnic minority groups which grant them much more tolerance in religious belief and practices than for the Hans. Therefore such policy favours national minorities in terms of religious belief as religion is regarded as their cultural heritage and not subject to religious governance by the Religious Affairs Bureau, but rather comes under the more powerful Committee for National Minorities Affairs. Because of this policy, Christianity was able to develop rather rapidly among some of the minority groups in China, such as the White Flower Miao, Lisu, Jingpo, Lahu, etc. and currently some groups such as the Lisu already have a Christian majority among their population and claim Christianity as their ethnic identity. Other minority groups hitherto without a viable Christian population are now having increasing numbers of converts, such as the Tibetans in Yunnan who have a dozen Christian communities, something which started about ten years ago.

The religious policy of the Chinese government prohibits religious groups from entering into the public domain, and especially from any expression of religious faith or religious propagation in public. Such policy effectively limits the open evangelisation work of Christians. For example, Christians cannot have open evangelistic campaigns in public and cannot display religious propagation material in public. In spite of the lack of such public access for evangelism, the Christian community still manages to have substantial numbers of converts – it is one of the fastest growing Christian communities in the world. One key factor for conversion is the positive Christian witness among relatives, friends and neighbours. Such silent witness, by good deeds, compounded by the evangelistic desire of

Chinese Christians directed at their friends and relatives, results in the large number of conversions.

Currently, there are Christian campus ministries often conducted by teachers and students in virtually every one of the 3,000 colleges and universities in China. There are many Christian businessmen's fellowships in major cities, often operating businessmen seminars and events attracting non-Christian business people in order to convey the Christian message. They also hold worship and Bible study groups, quite apart from local Christian congregations in hotel halls. Some Christian entrepreneurs hold evangelistic meetings within their factories and enterprises. Often the government will turn a blind eye because 1) it is not in the public domain, and 2) entrepreneurs and business people are a rather powerful class in China, and local officials would often tolerate such behaviour even though it might infringe on some policies. In fact, the emergence of these powerful Christian business people, as well as those Chinese intellectuals embracing Christian values – as both groups are on the fringe of the TSPM/CCC or ACC congregations – would have a profound impact on the Chinese social fabric as part of the Christian influence in China in the days to come.

Christian communities in China are like a kaleidoscope with multi-faceted manifestations. There are many tensions as well as co-operative ventures among these groups.<sup>10</sup> Christianity has developed from a tiny community, estimated at three million in 1982, into the current number of followers of at least fifty million<sup>11</sup> in merely three decades. It is amazing to note that such growth takes place in a socio-political milieu hostile to Christianity with the government's policy ranging from discouragement to prohibition of evangelistic activities. China has also become the country that produces the largest number of Bibles – more than sixty million have been printed, not an insignificant accomplishment under a Communist government. In fact, the Christian community in China – although still a minority group in the midst of 1.3 billion people as it is almost invisible in public – is like the Gospel parable of the yeast, silent yet powerful, invisible in public, but which gives rise to the dough, ending in surprising results.

Copyrighted Material

<sup>10</sup> See Kim-kwong Chan, 'Tensions and Reconciliation Between the Autonomous Christian Community and the China Christian Council/Three-Self Patriotic Movement', in Robert Schreier and Knud Jørgensen (eds), *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation* (Oxford: Regnum, 2013), 286-93.

<sup>11</sup> The government puts the figure at no less than 26 million, and some, such as Open Doors, place it at 80 million. This writer believes that there are at least 50 million in China who confess Christian faith and try to live out a life that is according to Christian values, regardless of their baptism or lack of it, or their participation or lack of it, in conventional Christian activities.

### **Missiological Implications**

There is a general assumption, especially in church circles, suggesting that more religious freedom will lead to better church growth. If there is no hindrance for the church to express its message, and no restrictions on the church to engage in the social domain, there will be more people exposed to the Christian message and this will lead to a higher rate of conversion. Consequently, there are many Christian groups who are advocating religious freedom in China with perhaps a missiological agenda. However, the Christian phenomenon in China suggests that, despite the severe constraints that Christianity has experienced, it has one of the fastest growth rates in recent years – at least a twenty-fold increase in thirty years without any public evangelistic campaigns. It shows a far better growth than those churches in neighbouring regions where Christians enjoy a much higher level of religious freedom and have virtually no limitations on their evangelistic efforts in society, and have poured a tremendous amount of resources into various forms of evangelistic work, such as Taiwan and Hong Kong, resulting in only doubling the Christian population in thirty years. Therefore, the experience of Christianity in China may not lead to the direct correlation between the amount of religious freedom and the growth of the Christian community. Of course, one may also argue that if Christians in China were to enjoy a higher level of religious freedom, the Christian population in China would rise to several hundred millions.

Ironically, the constraints imposed by the Chinese authorities on religion have enhanced the quality of Christianity in China. It has been noted that in China, a Communist party member would enjoy privileges such as getting a government job, etc. Being a Christian means one is discriminated against, as Christians are mostly barred from public office and from becoming part of the social elite. In fact, a Christian in China faces many kinds of discrimination and would be denied access to many socio-political resources. So one needs to calculate the social costs before becoming a Christian. Such cost would filter out many who might try to obtain personal gain by embracing the Christian faith, such as social upward mobility as happens in some other mission fields. In general, only those who are serious and who are willing to pay a cost will become Christians, as Christianity is a costly religion. As a result, the Christian community in China is, in general, loyal, dedicated, and possessing missiological zeal. This may be an unintended consequence of the Chinese policy on religion – that by suppressing Christians into a powerless position, it ironically renders them the power of powerlessness, since those who are willing to submit to such suppression become spiritually strong to witness to their faith in the most powerful manner.

A cursory glance at the religious policy of China would give people the impression that Christians are confined to a social ghetto where they cannot witness to their faith beyond this confined space by conventional missiological means. However, such socio-political constraint stimulates

Chinese Christians to develop ingenious ways to develop new ecclesial and missiological paradigms, such as the House Church and relational evangelism. Beneath the public manifestation of Christianity of the TSPM/CCC, seemingly under governmental control, there is a large segment of Christians who are living out their faith in the shadows, yet full of vitality in spreading the Gospel everywhere – for they are not confined by any policy of the government. In reality, China has been a fertile mission field since the 1980s, and never before in the history of China has Christianity enjoyed such prosperity, both in quality and quantity. It seems that the policy of limiting religious freedom has given rise to a new mission impetus for Christians, not only in China but also in global mission initiatives.<sup>12</sup>

As China is moving forward in the 21st century, it faces many structural challenges: rapid urbanisation, political reform and liberalisation, a heightening of nationalistic identity, wealth redistribution, greater global connection, and re-configuration of the geo-political order with China as a great emerging power. The Christian community within this Chinese socio-political milieu will also emerge as a significant force within the global Christian community. Its sheer number of adherents will dwarf many currently 'Christian' nations; its silent yet powerful witness may suggest a different paradigm of church growth; its ecclesial model of the centrality of the laity challenges our conventional clerical profession; its unique simple form of church activity and worship delineate what is basic to our faith; its pilgrimage within a hostile environment with limited religious liberty reveals the power of powerlessness; its diverse forms of ecclesial expression echo the spirit of Protestantism in its essence; its initial attempts in global mission may become a new vector of Christian expansion that may unfold a new chapter of church history;<sup>13</sup> and its emergence like a new dough may surprise us all as the possible work of God. All this is happening in a socio-political environment that is hostile to Christianity. The policy of limiting religious liberty, however undesirable, is in fact an important factor in shaping this silent yet new dough that may one day transform China from within.

Copyrighted Material

<sup>12</sup> Despite the various constraints, Chinese Christians had already begun global mission since the turn of the century. See Kim-kwong Chan, 'The Back To Jerusalem Movement: Mission Movement of the Chinese Community in Mainland China', in Wonsuk Ma and Kenneth Ross (eds), *Mission Spirituality and Authentic Discipleship* (Oxford: Regnum 2013), 172-92.

<sup>13</sup> Kim-kwong Chan, 'Case Study 2: Missiological Implications of Chinese Christians in Diaspora', in Enoch Wan Edited, *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice* (Portland, OR: Institute of Diaspora Studies, 2011), 181-97.



# BESET FROM WITHIN, BELEAGUERED FROM WITHOUT: NORTH KOREA'S CATACOMBS IN AN ERA OF EXTERMINATION

Tim A. Peters

## Historical Precedents of Internal and External Persecution in Korea

The Korean Peninsula has for centuries been the stage for both the remarkable growth of Christian faith as well as iron-fisted suppression. The introduction of the Roman Catholic faith to Korea is unique in that it occurred not by the arrival of a foreign missionary on Korean soil, but through Matteo Ricci and his fellow Jesuits' influence on emissaries of the Joseon Dynasty during the Koreans' tributary journeys to China's imperial capital in the early 17th Century.<sup>1</sup> Books on the Christian faith that Ricci entrusted to an emissary on his first encounter became the seedbed of faith to a growing study circle of the aristocratic and scholarly *yangban* in the diplomat's native land. Over time, word trickled down to the eager ears of the less privileged classes of a God who cared for the poor and vulnerable. Alarmed at the profusion of this new and foreign doctrine, Joseon's King Yeongjo in 1758 attempted to stamp out this new creed by pronouncing the Catholic faith 'an evil practice'<sup>2</sup> that threatened social stability. The three-quarters of a century that followed the outlawing of the Catholic faith witnessed periodic religious crackdowns, including the brutal Sinyu (1800) and Kilhae (1831) Massacres of Catholic believers by Joseon kings. Despite fierce state opposition to their faith, the number of Korean Catholics grew to nearly 13,000 during the reign of King Cheoljong who showed unusual tolerance.<sup>3</sup>

Protestant missionaries who arrived in Korea during the last two decades of the 19th Century found fertile soil for their preaching of a heavenly gospel and a down-to-earth emphasis on both education and social welfare.<sup>4</sup> This missionary movement found its full blossom in the 'Great

---

<sup>1</sup> Yongdok Kim, 'Yi Chosun-After Hideyoshi', in (no eds. listed) *Korea, Its Land, People and Culture of All Ages* (Seoul: Hakwon-sa Ltd, 1960), 61.

<sup>2</sup> *New World Encyclopedia*, 'Yeongjo of Joseon/Successful Economic Policy', Frank Kaufmann (ed): [www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Yeongjo\\_of\\_Joseon](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Yeongjo_of_Joseon)

<sup>3</sup> Kim, *Korea, Its Land*, 64-65.

<sup>4</sup> *Korean Report*, Vols.3-4 (Korean Information Office, Embassy of Korea, 1963), 241.



Revival of 1907', a spark that was first struck in the Methodist congregations of Wonsan, burst into flames among the Presbyterians in Pyongyang,<sup>5</sup> and then grew into a prairie fire of faith across the Korean Peninsula with a special fervency in the northern region. Once again, persecution came fast on the heels of an explosion of faith. The Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910 foreshadowed another era of official suppression of the Christian faith, one which reached a crescendo in the late 1920s and 1930s as increasingly iron-fisted Japanese governors-general sought to bring the Korean population into the 'benevolent fold of the Tenno (Japanese Emperor)',<sup>6</sup> alternately referred to as 'Arahigotami', *a god who is a human being*. Korean pastors and their congregations were forced to appear before a Shinto shrine and publicly declare their loyalty to Emperor Hirohito. Imprisonment and torture were common punishments for those who resisted; scores of churches were burned when congregations refused to submit to the Shinto shrines.<sup>7</sup>

Inconclusive discussions in early 1945 between Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin at the Yalta Conference left the fate of post-World War II Korea unclear. Months later, the stroke of a pen on a US State Department map marked out a divided Korea at the 38th Parallel. Intended to be but a temporary measure, this fateful line inadvertently launched the ever-diverging trajectories of the two Koreas for the next seven decades.<sup>8</sup> In 2015, the two Koreas share a common language and set of family surnames, yet after seventy years of division they are barely recognisable in social and economic terms as having shared a common history of 5,000 years.<sup>9</sup> The Republic of (South) Korea has grown into an open and democratic society, rising from the ashes of the Korean War to one of the leading economies on the globe, despite its modest size and distinct shortage of natural resources.<sup>10</sup> Its functioning, sometimes raucous, democracy is made up of a citizenry that exercises a full range of human rights and is home to vibrant Protestant and Catholic Christian faith

<sup>5</sup> Donald N. Clark, *Living Dangerously in Korea: The Western Experience 1900-1950* (Norwalk, CT: EastBridge, 2002) 38-39.

<sup>6</sup> Isop Hong, 'The Modern Period (1910-1945)', in *Korea: Its Land*, 98.

<sup>7</sup> James H. Grayson, 'Christianity and State Shinto in Colonial Korea: A Clash of Nationalisms and Religious Beliefs' (*DISKUS* Vol.1 No.2 Centre for Korean Studies, University of Sheffield, 1993), 13-30.

<sup>8</sup> Jinwung Kim, *A History of Korea: From 'Land of the Morning Calm' to States in Conflict* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 365.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas J. Belke, Juche: *A Christian Study of North Korea's State Religion* (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Book Co., 1999), 35.

<sup>10</sup> Sung-hee Jwa, *The Evolution of Large Corporations in Korea: A New Institutional Economics Perspective of the Chaebol* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2002), 1.

communities that together comprise roughly 25-30% of the total population.<sup>11</sup> The contrast with North Korea could not be starker.

### **Beset Within: Systematic and Ruthless Treatment of Religious Believers**

From the very formation of the Democratic People's Republic of (North) Korea (DPRK) in 1948 under the leadership of Kim Il Sung, people of faith were viewed with great distrust and suspicion. Kim, whose mother and father were both devout believers, undoubtedly was aware of the explosive potential of Christian revival to transform society given what had transpired in Pyongyang and Wonsan 41 years earlier.<sup>12</sup> To what degree these accounts of 1907 may have fuelled his crackdown on religion is not precisely known. What is clear is that Kim Il Sung lost no time in punishing clergy in labour and re-education camps, uprooting Christians from their residences, relocating them to different regions of the country (often to North Hamkyoung Province, known as North Korea's 'Siberia'), and simply killing others.<sup>13</sup>

From the beginning, North Korea's suppression of religion and its outright persecution of Christians have not been part of some hidden agenda, nor a secret policy of the state or its Workers' Party. Absolute and relentless indoctrination to dissuade religious believers from their faith was the initial phase ordered by Supreme Leader Kim Il Sung. Secondly, religious leaders found to be engaged in 'counter-revolutionary or anti-state activities [had to] be punished in accordance with related laws': an ominous category of 'targets of dictatorship' was designated for those clergy who stiffened their backs against reform by the Workers' Party.<sup>14</sup> Kim Il Sung himself publicly declared in 1962 to the Social Security Agency in the bluntest of terms: 'We cannot move into becoming a communist society if we have those religious people. For that reason, we tried all religious leaders above deacons and executed them... lay people were put to labour when they changed their beliefs or were locked up in prison; [and] when they did not... we executed all of them in 1958.'<sup>15</sup>

Copyrighted Material

<sup>11</sup> Donald L. Baker, *Korean Spirituality* (University of Hawaii Press: 2008), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Mike Kim, *Escaping North Korea* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield: 2008), 122.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Collins, *Marked for Life: Songbun, North Korea's Social Classification System* (Washington, DC: The Committee for Human Rights in North Korea: 2012), 79.

<sup>14</sup> In-duk Kang, 'North Korea's Policy on Religion', (*East Asian Review*, 7:1995), 94-95.

<sup>15</sup> Korean Bar Association, *2008 White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea* (Seoul: Korean Bar Association Sub-committee on Human Rights in North Korea, 2008), 133.

As subsequent examples painfully illustrate, state-sponsored repression of Christianity and the brutal persecution of its adherents have not changed since Kim Il Sung's blunt pronouncement 53 years ago. This reality is punctuated by the classification of North Korea as the world's worst governmental persecutor of Christians since 2001 by the respected international agency, Open Doors' *World Watch List*.<sup>16</sup>

A handful of former inmates of North Korea's *Kyohwaso* (Ordinary Prison Camp) #12 at Jeong-gori have been among the large number of refugees assisted along the so-called 'Asian underground railroad' by our non-governmental organisation (NGO). This prison is noteworthy in that it houses a relatively high number of inmates imprisoned directly because of their Christian faith. Strategic NGO logistical support, in co-operation with other activists, has enabled a number of former prisoners to make their way to freedom and share with the world the ordeal of North Korean detention. Our charity was not directly involved in the specific escape of Chae Yong-sik, the source of the following testimony; nevertheless, his story is representative of other former inmates from *Kyohwaso* #12 Prison. Mr Chae's account deals specifically with the 'crime' of being a Christian in North Korea:

One day in August of 1998, about 40 prisoners of a farm work unit were on their way to the fields at dawn. It was still quite dark. The weary workers came across a strange bag lying in the middle of the road. Opening the large bag, they found a human corpse wearing a red shirt. The prisoners immediately identified the deceased as Kim Ju-won, the Christian prisoner, who had been given a red shirt by his sister during a family visit. The prisoners remembered that Kim had recently been called out at night some days previously, ostensibly for reassignment to another prison.

A number of executed prisoners' bodies had been carried away at night for burial upon the more remote hilly area of the prison camp. One of the primitive body bags had apparently tumbled unseen from a truck or cart carrying victims of secret executions to the disposal area for prisoners' corpses. The discovery of the strangled body of their fellow prisoner and persecuted Christian, Kim Ju-won, in the distinctive red shirt, was soon whispered from prisoner to prisoner, thereby quickly exposing the prison's secret executions, making them common knowledge among a wide circle of inmates.<sup>17</sup>

A female former inmate of *Kyohwaso* #1 Prison at Kaecheon provided her testimony at a UN Commission of Inquiry hearing and explained that she was 'sent to prison for expressing her Christian religion, [and] was

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Ottenberg, *World Wide Watch List 2015* (Harderwijk: Open Doors International: 2015): <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/north-korea>

<sup>17</sup> Sang Hun Kim, *Eyewitness: A Litany of North Korean Crimes Against Humanity* (Seoul: NKHR: The 3rd Way: 2012), 82.

punished ten times with solitary confinement during her seven years of detention. She was also assigned to pull the cart used to remove excrement from the prison latrines. Several times the guards made her lick off the excrement that had spilled over in order to humiliate and discipline her.’<sup>18</sup>

**Beleaguered from Without:  
Christian Refugees and the ‘Russian Roulette’ of China’s Illegal  
Forcible Repatriation Policy of DPRK Escapees**

Tens of thousands of North Korean refugees live in fear and hiding throughout China. Driven by famine and an oppressive social system, a growing stream of North Koreans, from every current of North Korean society, risk their lives to furtively cross the Tumen River and Yalu River borders to China. For the fortunate few who evade capture by border patrols on the adjoining riverbanks, the mirage of China as a safe haven quickly fades in the glare of the enforcement policies of a security apparatus perpetually on high alert for any uncontrolled population movements on its borders, particularly from impoverished North Korea. At best, the well-tilled and prosperous Yenbian region of northeast China, home to over two million ethnic Korean-Chinese citizens, provides only a brief respite from the hunger and repression that haunt everyday life in Kim Jong-eun’s ‘workers’ paradise’. With their clothing still wet from the river crossing, refugees are typically dismayed to discover that China is far less a ‘light at the end of a dark tunnel’ than its continuation, a ‘no-man’s land’ fraught with unexpected new perils: betrayal, capture, and rampant human trafficking. The dangers do not end there. Refugees dread interception by North Korea’s own secret police who roam China freely, tracking down refugees to either eliminate them ‘on the spot’ or drag them back to prisons in the North. Despite the extraordinary odds stacked against them, new but smaller waves of North Korean refugees continue to accept the rising hazards of their fugitive existence in China in preference to the dismal and oppressive conditions in their homeland. Their numbers fluctuate according to border controls imposed at any given time by both the North Koreans and the Chinese; however, since the death of Kim Jong-il in December 2011, border security has only tightened on both sides.<sup>19</sup>

As a signatory to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is bound by its treaty obligations to protect populations fleeing under fear of persecution, including allowing the free movement of the Beijing resident staff of the United Nations High

<sup>18</sup> UN Commission of Inquiry (hereinafter COI), *Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea* (A/HRC/25/CRP.1), (Geneva: UN Human Rights Council: 2014), 253.

<sup>19</sup> Tim A. Peters, ‘Refugees’ (chapter 6). In John Kotch and Frank-Jurgen Richter (eds), *Korea Confronts the Future*. (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2005), 111.

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to visit the Sino-DPRK border area.<sup>20</sup> The government of China, however, has consistently blocked the UNHCR staff from approaching the border area for the purpose of carrying out interviews of North Korean border-crossers to determine if they are indeed refugees.<sup>21</sup> The Chinese government has given a 'one-size-fits-all' label to the North Korean border-crossers: 'illegal economic migrants', and systematically returns them to North Korea.<sup>22</sup>

For well over a decade, an abundant body of evidence from many thousands of North Korean refugees, a substantial number being professed Christians, has been amassed by various data-collecting human rights organisations, including the North Korean Database Center, the UN Commission of Inquiry, the National Human Rights Commission of Korea, the US Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, the Korean Bar Association, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. The extraordinary breadth of this evidence underscores the North Korean refugees' 'well-founded fear of persecution' upon forcible return to their home country by the government of China.<sup>23</sup>

Upon forced repatriation, North Korean refugees are subjected to a spectrum of punishments, the full breadth of which has been determined by the UN Commission of Inquiry as amounting to crimes against humanity. These 'inhumane acts' include: imprisonment (with special sentences for Christians in ordinary or political prisons); torture and murder (including border guards authorised to shoot border-crossers at will; the crime of infanticide carried out by border guards when a baby of a returning refugee woman is known or suspected to be fathered by a Chinese male); rape and other forms of sexual violence (inflicted on women refugees during State Security Agency interrogation and/or during subsequent prison terms); and enforced disappearances (State Security agents abduct border-crossers in China, as well as South Korean or Chinese citizens who have helped the refugees).<sup>24</sup> All of the above-mentioned crimes against humanity perpetrated on North Koreans who flee their homeland and suffer forcible return by China or other countries are deemed as ongoing, according to the COI report in March of 2014.<sup>25</sup> The following refugee accounts are

<sup>20</sup> Melanie Kirkpatrick, *Escape from North Korea: The Untold Story of Asia's Underground Railroad* (New York: Encounter Books, 2012), 299-301.

<sup>21</sup> Jim Butterworth and Lisa Sleeth, *Seoul Train* transcript of statement by Ruud Lubbers, UN High Commissioner for Refugees and interview of UNHCR spokesman, Rod Redmond (Denver, CO: Incite Productions: 2006), from minute 29:33 to minute 32:33 in the documentary.

<sup>22</sup> Butterworth and Sleeth, *Seoul Train* <transcript of PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman on the status of North Korean escapees>, from 27:00 to 28:42 minute.

<sup>23</sup> Kirkpatrick, *Escape from North Korea*, 147- 149.

<sup>24</sup> COI, 335.

<sup>25</sup> COI, 335-37.

indicative of the experiences of many North Koreans who desperately seek freedom:

### A) *The Untimely Death of Yoo Chul Min*

A ten-year-old North Korean refugee boy hiding in China swiftly assessed the dilemma before him in deciding to undertake a desperate life-and-death gamble to cross the arid Sino-Mongolian border under the cover of darkness, settling on a sobering course of action light years from the normal concerns of an elementary school student. However, for North Korean refugees, reaching Mongolia safely had meant putting to rest the constant fear of being arrested in China and the specter of repatriation to North Korea.

His name was Yoo Chul Min and his fateful decision ended with a tailspin into tragedy. Guided by South Korean missionaries in the northeast China region, he had been placed together with a group of five adult North Korean fugitives in China who were also desperate for even a fleeting glimpse of freedom. His adult North Korean companions were unfamiliar with the use of a compass and lost their bearings for 26 hours in the massive expanse of the Mongolian frontier. The lad's chubby pink cheeks, the result of months of an improved diet in China, masked the fatal reality of weakened vital organs brought on by years of malnutrition. A decade of chronic food shortages in his home province of North Hamkyoung had taken its toll, robbing Chul Min of the normal reserve of endurance and resistance to the elements one would associate with a healthy, growing pre-teenager. In the end, Chul Min's heroic young life was pitifully snuffed out by exhaustion and exposure in the Gobi Desert, yet another North Korean victim of what the UN terms 'slow-motion famine.' Once the surviving members of the group had regained their bearings, his lifeless body was quickly thrown across the shoulders of another refugee and carried to the nearest Mongolian guard post barely visible on the desert horizon.

This young boy's story became of personal interest because our paths had crossed during our own NGO/mission work in China sheltering North Korean refugees. Our encounter had been brief, as are most meetings of activists and refugees in the capital city of the border Yenbian region of China. It was immediately evident that I was the first Caucasian ten-year-old Chul Min had ever met. From his expression, he likely saw in me someone who closely resembled ubiquitous pictures and drawings of those hated 'missionary devils'<sup>26</sup> from America that appear in North Korean schoolbooks and propaganda posters. Therefore, by necessity, our initial conversation was awkward. Taking a children's book off my friend's bookshelf and noting it was the same publication I'd read to my own five children when they were small, I motioned as casually as I could for him to sit down and relax, inviting him to look at the storybook. Chul Min warily agreed and was soon engrossed, reading aloud the Korean text in the illustrated children's Bible I

---

<sup>26</sup> B.R. Myers, *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves – And Why It Matters* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2010), 150.

had chosen. Savoring this tiny victory of indirectly introducing a Bible story to Chul Min, I sat and listened to his reading, fervently hoping that somehow this brief episode would begin to bridge the gap between our two worlds. Perhaps, I mused, Chul Min and my grandson might someday be friends in South Korea after his journey to freedom was complete. It never dawned on me that I would never see him alive again.

In the days that followed the jarring news of Chul Min's death, the magnitude of the tragedy grew. Government officials in Mongolia refused our entreaties to wait for Chul Min's father, himself a recent arrival to the South from China, to travel to Mongolia to identify his son's body and to be present at his burial. In a tragic fate that seems uniquely North Korean, endless weeks passed before Chul Min's father was able to successfully navigate the maze of South Korean and Mongolian bureaucracies and gain permission to travel to Mongolia. At last, he was led to a nondescript plot in the vast expanse of sand that is the Gobi Desert marked off only by a small wooden cross, left alone to his grief and bewilderment beside his son's windswept grave.<sup>27</sup>

### *B) The Specific Dread Felt by Christian Refugees in the face of Forced Repatriation by China*

Numerous interviews of refugees who have made it safely to third countries reveal a terror aroused in the hearts of North Korean refugees hiding in China linked to the prospect of arrest in China and forced repatriation to the DPRK. Many admit to having carried either a razor blade or some form of poison on their person, a grim preparation for suicide as an alternative to facing the fury of DPRK State Security Agency's interrogators upon involuntary repatriation to the North. 'Wilful flight to another state' in the North Korean criminal code is tantamount to treason and the punishment can be as severe as the death penalty.<sup>28</sup> Such dread of forced repatriation is compounded if the refugee has been in contact with Christians in China or other countries such as Russia. A finely honed DPRK interrogation procedure includes an inquisition focusing on the captured refugee's possible contact with foreign Christians in China.<sup>29</sup> Chinese authorities sometimes provide their North Korean counterparts with reports detailing circumstances of the refugee's arrest, including whether the raid took place in a church, during a Bible study or in a similar religious setting. Refugees daring to make outside religious contacts are invariably aware that DPRK authorities perceive such activities as treasonous, and the consequences will be grave.<sup>30</sup> Repatriated North Korean refugees who are discovered to have converted to Christianity in

<sup>27</sup> Peters, 'Refugees', 2005, 111-12.

<sup>28</sup> Kirkpatrick, *Escape from North Korea*, 142.

<sup>29</sup> David Hawk, *The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps* (Washington, DC: Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2003), 58.

<sup>30</sup> Tim A. Peters, 'Dark Night of the Soul: The Price of Exercising Religious Belief in North Korea' (written and oral testimony presented to the UK Parliament's All Party Parliamentary Group on International Freedom of Religion or Belief in a 20th November 2014 hearing), 1-4.



China or other countries are given special prison sentences in either ordinary jails or political prison camps.<sup>31</sup>

### **A Church in Tribulation: Believers and Missions in Multiple Hostile Environments**

By providing a backdrop for the opposition experienced by North Korean Christians, both within and outside their national borders, it should come as no surprise that the remnant of the North Korean church, which dates from 'Great Revival' of 1907, operates with almost world-class security protocols as a 'catacombs underground'. This network is so effective at keeping 'off the radar' that many trained outside observers, both secular and ecclesiastical, do not even believe that it exists! David Hawk, highly respected researcher into both the Cambodian 'Killing Fields' and North Korean human rights abuses, wrote: 'In this [repressive North Korean] environment, it is hard to imagine any independent religious belief or practice surviving openly unless it serves the government's larger purpose.'<sup>32</sup>

Such statements from human rights specialists notwithstanding, an ancient truth bequeathed to us from the Church Father Tertullian eighteen centuries ago has survived to this day, 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.'<sup>33</sup> If one looks at this statement as a kind of mathematical equation, it's possible to come to the following conclusion: *if* the blood of martyrs is spilled, it *will* act as a seed, and there *will* be church growth. This author's experience strongly suggests this progression is exactly the case with the church in North Korea. Based on the author's personal experience, fourteen years of waiting, watching and active, indirect helping were required to catch a glimpse of the reality of the North Korean church. Considering the extent of social control within the North Korean state, such extreme secrecy should not be surprising. Only an ingenious and sophisticated communication system could conceivably withstand and evade governmental scrutiny. It also follows that for the author to write prudently and responsibly about secret Christians inside North Korea, such descriptions need to be restricted to generalities; very few direct references will be revealed to protect sensitive sources. It is safe to say, for example, that North Korean Christians do meet for prayer, worship and exhortation even if it is two or three brethren at a time in an ordinary setting. Training is most assuredly underway to pass the baton from pastors and evangelists

---

<sup>31</sup> COI, 335.

<sup>32</sup> David Hawk, *Thank You, Father Kim Il Sung: Eyewitness Accounts of Severe Violations of Freedom of Thought, Conscience, and Religion in North Korea* (Washington, DC: US Commission on International Religious Freedom: 2005), iv.

<sup>33</sup> David Wright & Philip F. Esler, 'Tertullian,' *The Early Christian World*, Vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 2000), 1027-47.



now in their seventies and eighties to a new generation of leadership. North Korean Christian leaders are not only concerned about the spiritual welfare of their flocks, but are also cognisant of the pressing economic and health needs of their congregations.<sup>34</sup>

Formulating and executing effective mission programmes to meet believers' needs poses unique challenges. While other mission fields around the globe may exhibit similar economic, cultural and social obstacles to evangelism, North Korea's extreme form of militaristic and race-based nationalism<sup>35</sup> with its strict hereditary leadership cause the DPRK to be a daunting challenge for traditional mission strategies. With a few notable clandestine exceptions,<sup>36</sup> setting up an open residential mission within North Korean borders is out of the question. Missionaries are officially vilified and foreigner visitors are virtually suffocated with surveillance by 'minders' whenever they set foot on North Korean soil.<sup>37</sup> Just one example of 'tourist guide' vigilance: in 2014 a valiant, stout-hearted foreign evangelist with many decades of mission experience in East Asia was caught leaving a gospel tract at a North Korean cultural site.<sup>38</sup> He was then subjected to sixteen days of incarceration and intensive interrogation, including incessant accusations that he was an American or South Korean spy. To his credit, the seasoned veteran withstood the constant browbeating and slyly turned the interrogation sessions into evangelistic conversations.<sup>39</sup> The interrogators' drumbeat of accusations that he was a spy clearly exposed the 'dictatorial paranoia' that is inherent in the North Korea's Kim family regime, and functions as a potent driver of the state-sponsored persecution of Christian believers.<sup>40</sup>

To make matters even more complex for potential mission workers, North Korea's closest neighbour, China, is anything but hospitable to the idea of being used as a staging area for missionaries who wish to focus on

<sup>34</sup> Secure communication from North Korean church leaders indicating receipt of special New Testaments from our NGO for the purposes of training young leadership; also acknowledged were various donated medications and health aids to assist ailing aged believers in particular.

<sup>35</sup> Myers, *The Cleanest Race*, 40.

<sup>36</sup> Security concerns on behalf of those living and working inside North Korea prevent the author from providing further details.

<sup>37</sup> John Sweeney, *North Korea Undercover: Inside the World's Most Secret State* (London: Bantam Press, 2013), 12.

<sup>38</sup> Christy Choi, 'N Korea frees remorseful missionary: Evangelist flown to Beijing after penning apology for spreading Bible tracts at temple' (Hong Kong: *South China Morning Post*, 3rd March 2014), City C1: [www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1439168/north-korea-sets-free-hong-kong-based-missionary?page=all](http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1439168/north-korea-sets-free-hong-kong-based-missionary?page=all)

<sup>39</sup> Tim Peters, private conversation in a hotel café with the missionary in Beijing one day after his release from North Korean detention, 4th March 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel Ottenberg, *World Wide Watch List 2015* (Summary: Top Ten Country Profiles), 1.

the vast spiritual and humanitarian needs of the 20+ million citizens north of the 38th Parallel. One very recent incident is revealing. Peter Hahn's selfless Christian social welfare work for both Chinese and North Korean children was carried out on either sides of the north-eastern Sino-North Korean border for nearly twenty years. In July 2014, Chinese security officials raided his mission office, put him under investigation, froze his humanitarian bank accounts, and confiscated his buildings and equipment. Eight months of withering interrogation later and languishing in a jail cell in Longjing, China, Hahn stands accused of embezzlement and falsifying receipts, charges that his Chinese lawyers flatly label as 'groundless and mere excuses'.<sup>41</sup> Such characterisation by the government makes a mockery of the Korean American's decades of sacrificial service to the needy. The clampdown on Hahn and hundreds of other Christian workers along the border in since 2011 is likely to be driven, at least in part, by the desire of new leadership in both China and North Korea to limit foreign Christian influence on DPRK's society.<sup>42</sup>

A second and very vital component of the North Korean church could be colourfully rendered as the 'refugee or émigré church', in recognition of those North Koreans who find some way to make human contact outside their own borders. Contact with Christians along the border has been frequent in large part because South Korean, overseas Korean and other foreign Christians make up the backbone of the aid community that reaches out to help North Koreans inside and outside their borders.<sup>43</sup> Bible classes, leadership training programmes, food and medicine aid projects are conducted by believers along the border to provide both spiritual and humanitarian assistance. This assistance is provided not only to temporary and permanent escapees who've fled their homeland in search of food and freedom, but also to documented North Korean temporary migrant workers who may spend only a few months to a year in China, Russia or other countries before returning legally to their homes. Innovative diaconal projects seek to maximise a 'trickle down' effect to the most vulnerable North Koreans regarding aid shipments directly to North Korea or using returning border-crossers or migrant workers to deliver humanitarian assistance. One such effort, prepared in China and quietly sent into the North, uses high-nutrition rice crackers as valuable food supplements. Eschewed by North Korean elites as 'dog food', this humble rice staple has a six-month shelf life, can swell into a hearty hot meal by simply adding

---

<sup>41</sup> Bill Powell, *The Last Bond Bad Guy* (New York: Newsweek/IBT Media: 26 February 2015), 1.

<sup>42</sup> Powell, *The Last Bond Bad Guy*, 3-4.

<sup>43</sup> Kirkpatrick, *Escape from North Korea*, 45-46.

boiling water, and regularly reaches the North's destitute who rank low on the social ladder.<sup>44</sup>

To illustrate a number of facets of missions to vulnerable North Koreans outside their borders, the following summary of a series of events that took place in our organisation's work with children is presented. The account earlier in this chapter of Yoo Chul Min is a story of the 'First Wave' of North Korean children to come across the border in the late 1990s into the early years of the new century. Ryong's story, in contrast, depicts the 'Second Wave' of North Korean orphans, children who've typically lost their North Korean refugee mothers in China to human trafficking and/or the China state security apparatus' policy of forced repatriation.

Eleven-year-old Ryong's story was painfully familiar. His refugee mother had been discovered by Chinese authorities, perhaps reported on by a neighbor eager for a government bounty payment, and then detained by Chinese police in the rural village nearby. The police investigation revealed that the woman had, like tens of thousands of other North Koreans, been sold by human traffickers to a Chinese man to be his 'wife'. Worse still, the boy's mother was then accused by authorities of co-operating with traffickers to entice other North Korean refugee women to come to the same area. Already labeled as an 'illegal economic migrant' by official state policy, the judicial process in her case was a travesty of justice and Ryong's mother was given a very harsh seven-year prison sentence. Ryong's gloom deepened when the boy's Chinese birth father abruptly abandoned him upon learning that his North Korean 'wife' had been arrested and taken away by local police officials.

Our eyes drawn to a collapsing and abandoned farm cottage, we learned from another refugee woman that the boy had sought refuge from the cold and rain by huddling under the part of the farmhouse roof that still remained intact. Our refugee guide added the boy had survived by eating scraps thrown in the village garbage site nearby. Not surprisingly, he had contracted food poisoning from his rancid meals. Providentially, a local Chinese evangelist had been alerted of the boy's plight by our guide, taken him under his wing and with his wife's help, nursed him back to health.

In short, Ryong became the first child in one of several foster homes our project has set up for children of arrested or repatriated North Korean refugee women. Before long, six more children from similar situations joined Ryong in the home overseen by the same couple who first showed mercy to the ailing boy. Recent years have brought both joy and hardship for him. Ryong was able to visit his mother in prison after six years of her incarceration. To the astonishment of the evangelist who had never heard the boy use anything other than the Chinese language inside the foster home, Ryong spoke fluently

---

<sup>44</sup> Pastor XXXXX Han, agreement with HHK/Catacombs for the delivery from the border area of two tons of rice crackers (*nurunji*) through small individual packages entrusted to returning North Koreans from China (NE China: Confidential agreement/receipt document: 1st December 2014) 1.

to his mother in Korean telling her that he loved her! Equally remarkable was Ryong's humbled and repentant mother, overwhelmed with tears to see her son standing before her, a healthy, well-adjusted teenager. Recognizing the critical role Christians had played in her son's care, she pledged that if any way could be found to allow her to remain in China after her release from prison, she would gladly serve the foster home that helped her son and other children like him who had been deprived of their mothers' love and care by state policy.

Release in China was not to be. Ryong's mother was sent directly back to North Korea after her seven years' detention was served despite every effort by all Christians involved. Still dealing with that disappointment, Ryong was to discover that his absentee father had reappeared and demanded his son follow him to work on his farm. Heart-stricken, the foster parents were powerless to oppose the father's demand, reminded anew that their voluntary Christian social work lacks legal standing under Chinese law. With them, we encouraged ourselves with the fact that the seeds of love and faith sown in Ryong's heart can never be uprooted despite such cruel and harsh realities. Their belief in the sovereignty of God and the truth that all things will yet work together for good that are called of God could not be shaken.<sup>45</sup>

The above account captures one of the great thrills of mission: to witness those who've been trapped in darkness transformed as the seeds of the Good News find fertile soil. North Korean refugee women, systematically degraded by rampant human trafficking in China, time and again embrace the redemptive message believers share with them, faithfully imparting the value of this treasure to their children despite reunions that too often are painfully short.

Bringing mission to North Korea full circle, we close with the wonderful example of Mr Lee Min Bok, a former agricultural researcher for the North Korean Academic Society of Agriculture and Science, who fled North Korea after being condemned and threatened by senior government officials for encouraging private ownership of farmland as a method to improve agricultural output. Mr Lee, now resident in South Korea and an enthusiastic Christian, devotes himself to sending balloons into his former homeland that are ingeniously triggered with devices to drop their payload at a certain altitude and latitude. Each balloon carries thousands of pamphlets with a Christian message of hope and love. Fully mindful of the gravely distorted image of Christians and missionaries that the North Korean leadership disseminates, Mr Lee strives in his 'balloon messages' to portray a more accurate picture based on his personal experience following his dramatic escape as a refugee. What he sends to his countrymen is an expression vibrant both in Mr Lee's newly gained freedom of belief as well as a love for the Gospel and its dissemination:

This is my experience with Christian missionaries and Christianity:

---

<sup>45</sup> Tim A. Peters, *A Ray of Hope Against a Landscape of Heartbreak and Tragedy* (Seoul: North Korean Monthly: 2014), 10-15.

I had believed the North Korean teaching that religion is an ‘underdeveloped teaching and anti-revolutionary opium’ and Christian missionaries are the worst of all rascals.

But it was the Christian missionaries who extended helping hands to me when I was in crisis and had serious problems. Through them, I found out that their belief is totally contrary to what I was told in North Korea. They preach ‘love’, and tell us to love each other to the extent of loving your enemy. They never preach hate... ‘The truth shall set you free’ is the word of God. We must love each other, North and South Korea. This is the Christian message today.<sup>46</sup>

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

Copyrighted Material

---

<sup>46</sup> Min-bok Lee, *The Christian Missionaries and Christians I Have Met* (Seoul: Self-Published Pamphlet: 2014), 1-2.

# **IS THE SILK ROAD STILL OPEN? CENTRAL ASIA: CHRISTIAN MISSION UNDER GROWING RESTRICTIONS ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

**Anneta Vysotskaya**

‘We do not want to be controlled by fears. God gives us joy. We understand the danger but we want to live a normal life and to do God’s work under the circumstances’.

(A church leader from a Central Asian country)

## **The Task of Mission**

Since the times of the apostles, Christian witness motivated by love for God and for people, and guided by the Holy Spirit, remains the most important task of the Christian church. The privilege and responsibility of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with other people are an essential part of any Christian’s life. It cannot be expressed better than by the words of the Apostle Paul ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!’ (1 Cor. 9:16 NIV). The same idea is recognised in the Preamble to ‘Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World. Recommendations for Conduct’ – a historic document on Christian ethics developed by an interdenominational group of Christian experts from the WEA, WCC and the Vatican’s Pontifical Council: ‘Mission belongs to the very being of the church. Proclaiming the word of God and witnessing to the world is essential for every Christian’.<sup>1</sup> From the moment the Holy Spirit of God comes to live in a human being who has been forgiven and saved by God, it becomes a natural desire flowing from the believer’s new nature to be a part of the mission task force. The Great Commission of the Lord Jesus Christ to go and make disciples of all nations makes every believer a lawful ambassador for Christ, calling the world to be reconciled with God. The Christian mission is God’s way of spreading the Good News to all nations, in all sectors of the human society, among all classes, age groups, genders and nationalities.

---

<sup>1</sup> World Council of Churches, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, World Evangelical Alliance: *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World. Recommendations for Conduct*, 2011.

### Freedom of Belief and Christian Mission

Freedom of religion and belief is one of the fundamental human rights. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says: 'Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance'.<sup>2</sup> The right of every person to believe in God, to worship him and to publicly share his faith with other people has been enshrined both in international law and the national laws and legislations of various countries. Therefore, Christian mission is a lawful right of all believers supported both by God's and human laws. However, in reality, Christian mission in the modern world is often hindered, opposed or directly attacked, and Christians face a lot of hostility when they try to manifest their belief to the society they live in. Their religious freedom is often restricted and they may even face different forms of persecution from the negative presentation of their activities in the mass media to discrimination in their work, education or other community environments, and to more severe forms of persecution from fines to imprisonment, torture and even death.

'In some contexts, living and proclaiming the Gospel is difficult, hindered or even prohibited, yet Christians are commissioned by Christ to continue faithfully in solidarity with one another in their witness to Him'.<sup>3</sup> The church in Central Asia is a good illustration and example of how Christian mission is being carried out in the context of growing restrictions on religious freedom, and in some cases severe persecution of believers, by the state authorities and hostile-minded local communities. The goal of this chapter is to give a general overview of the historical background and the current situation of the church in Central Asia, to show in general the restrictions on religious freedom in that region and how Christian witness and mission are practised in that context.

### Geographical and Historical Background of the Church in Central Asia

Central Asia (sometimes referred as Middle Asia or 'stans') is a core region of the Asian continent which includes five countries that were once part of the Russian Empire and later of the USSR, which became independent after the fall of Communist rule: Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. The population of Central Asia exceeds 60 million people represented by about 100 ethnic groups with the majority of the population claiming Sunni Islam as their religion. However, Central

---

<sup>2</sup> *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*: [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org)

<sup>3</sup> *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World. Recommendations for Conduct*: [www.oikoumene.org](http://www.oikoumene.org) (2011).

Asia has a long history of Christian mission which starts in the times of the early church.

Speaking about the uniqueness of the church in Central Asia, one of the senior church leaders in that region, Dmitri Pitirimov, says: 'The seed was the same: the Good News of Jesus Christ – the Gospel addressing the whole world. But it was sown by different sowers, it grew up in a different soil, its fruit was reaped and stored in barns by different reapers and had its own unique taste.'<sup>4</sup>

### *The Early Church and Nestorian Influence*

Church tradition says that the first messengers of the Gospel came to Central Asia from Persia as early as the first century. The apostles Thomas and Andrew are believed to have preached to various people groups in Central Asia. The Silk Road which was the main network of trading routes of the ancient world connecting Eastern Asia with the Mediterranean region also served as a route for the monks and missionaries of different religions, including Christianity.<sup>5</sup> By the fourth century, Christianity was well established in Central Asia, mainly through Nestorian Christians who spread the Gospel all across Asia with zeal and consistency.

### *The Islamic Invasion*

In the middle of the seventh century, Islam began to invade the Central Asian region. However, for a long period the Nestorian communities continued to prosper under the new regime and remained influential in the region even during the time of the Mongol rule, playing an important role in the Mongol state as soldiers, officials, physicians, etc. The process of Islamisation of the region took several centuries and resulted in completely wiping out the Christian presence across the vast territory of Central Asia by the 14th century.<sup>6</sup>

### *The Reappearance of Christianity as a Foreign Religion in the Middle of the 19th Century*

The second appearance of Christianity in Central Asia was in the form of the Russian Orthodox Church, German Mennonites and, later, Protestant Christians moving voluntarily or by force as a result of persecution from

---

<sup>4</sup> Dmitri Pitirimov: *Istoriya Khristianstva v Tsentralnoy Azii (History of Christianity in Central Asia)*: [www.touruz.narod.ru](http://www.touruz.narod.ru)

<sup>5</sup> Ian Gillman and Hans Joachim Klimkeit (eds), *Christians in Asia before 1500* (University of Michigan Press: 1999), 205.

<sup>6</sup> Ian Gillman and Hans Joachim Klimkeit (eds), *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 206.



the central part of the Russian Empire. However, the local population saw Christianity as a foreign religion suitable only for Russians and Germans while Islam was considered to be the true religion of the ancestors. At the same time, the Christian migrant population did not show much initiative in sharing their faith with local people. Even today, in many parts of Central Asia, Christianity is often considered to be the religion for Russians, and therefore unacceptable for ethnic people.

### *The Militant Atheism of the Soviet Era*

During the Soviet period, religious freedom was severely restricted. Christianity, together with all other religions, experienced persecution from the Communist authorities. It was the time of the so-called 'militant atheism' when the atheistic ideology was methodically imposed on hundreds of millions of Soviet people from early childhood through the educational system and the well-planned mass media campaigns for almost seventy years. Many religious leaders and ordinary believers were put in prison and died as martyrs during that period. The destruction and desecration of places of worship occurred across the land, and the buildings were used for other purposes. While some religious organisations survived under the strict watch of the Soviet authorities, other religious groups had to meet secretly underground, facing imprisonment, death, and other forms of punishment if found. However, the missionary activities of the church continued even during that tremendously difficult and dangerous period. In Central Asia, the pressure on the churches was in some places not as hard as in Russia, and in some places the churches continued to grow even though facing many restrictions. However, Christian witness during that period was focused mainly on non-ethnic people and individual ethnic Christians were rare – more the exception than the norm.

### *The Period of Spiritual Revival and Foreign Missions*

In the 1990s, a big spiritual revival occurred all across the territory of the former Soviet Union, including Central Asia. A new era was begun with Gorbachev's *perestroika*. The door was opened wide to different freedoms, including the freedom of conscience and religious belief. The fall of the Iron Curtain symbolised the end of Communism rule. As a result of many years of godless rule, people experienced deep spiritual hunger. The new church was born in Central Asia in the time of great political and economic changes and turmoil. The 1990s were a time of active missionary work. Long-term and short-term missionaries from all over the world (Korea, USA and some European countries) flooded the land, preaching the Gospel, baptising new converts, disciplining new believers and starting new churches and Bible schools. Many foreign missionaries used social work as a way of outreach. It was a short but very fruitful period during which mission was

focused on both ethnic and non-ethnic people. However, at the end of the 1990s growing restrictions on religious freedom started to bite in various Central Asian countries. Foreign missionaries were pressed under various excuses to move out of the country. The restrictions targeted not only Christian churches but other religions as well, and were partly meant as a measure of protection and stabilisation of the political situation in Central Asia.

### *The Migration of the Russian Population out of the Region and its Impact on the Church*

The migration of the Russian and other non-ethnic populations out of the Central Asian region during since the 1990s has been a continuous process. As a result, the number of native Russians, including Russian church members and church leaders, continues to decrease in Central Asia as a whole. Traditionally, the old Protestant churches that experienced persecution during the Soviet period in Central Asia consisted mainly of non-ethnic Christians: Russians, Germans and Koreans. With the decrease in the number of non-ethnic Christians in Central Asia, the number of ethnic Christians and ethnic church leaders is increasing and now they represent a significant part of the church. The number of Russian Christians and church leaders in Central Asia is still high but the proportion of Central Asian ethnic Christians increased significantly.

### **Religious Freedom in Central Asia**

According to Open Doors World Watch List 2015,<sup>7</sup> four of the Central Asian countries are included in the list of fifty countries where Christians experience different forms of persecution: Uzbekistan occupies the 15th place on that list, Turkmenistan the 20th, Kazakhstan the 42<sup>nd</sup>, and Tajikistan the 45th. Although Kyrgyzstan is the only Central Asian country that was not included in the list, Christians in that country also experience restrictions on religious freedom and persecution from the Muslim community, especially in rural areas. It is also important to note that, in a large number of cases, persecution remains unreported because Christians consider it to be the norm of Christian life to experience persecution and just to accept it. The other reason for the non-reporting of cases of persecution is that persecuted Christians do not believe that trying to resist the unlawful restrictions and persecution will have any positive results, and that it may in fact make things worse for them.

There are two key factors that restrict freedom of belief and Christian mission in Central Asia and often result in the persecution of Christians:

1. Legislative restrictions introduced by the government.

---

<sup>7</sup> Open Doors World Watch List, 2015.

2. Religious intolerance on the part of the predominantly Muslim population.

### *Restrictions by the Government*

The short period of religious freedom which followed the collapse of the Communist regime and opened the doors for missionaries from other countries ended quicker than it started. The government of the Central Asian countries, following the example of Russia, quickly introduced a policy of supporting certain (so-called 'traditional') religions and denominations while resisting the activities of others, mainly foreign missionaries and so-called 'non-traditional' religions. This was done partly to use certain religions for consolidating the whole population of that region, and also to reduce the threat of destabilisation and ethnic conflicts. Amendments were made to the existing laws. More restrictions on religious freedom were introduced, especially regarding sharing faith with other people, producing and owning religious literature and other resources, the registration of new religious organisations – worshipping anywhere apart from the buildings of the registered religious organisations – on children's and youth work, and the religious education of believers. While it is extremely difficult and often impossible to be registered by the state, unregistered home churches, meeting in believers' homes, experience more pressure and persecution than registered churches.

Case 1: As a Baptist family in Navoi gathered with relatives and friends for a Sunday morning meeting for worship, eleven anti-terrorism police officers and other officials raided the Alpayev family home, and church members complained to Forum 18 News Service. They searched the home without a warrant and went on to search the home of another church member present, Nikolai Serin, seizing all the religious literature they could find. Police and other authorities keep telling him and other Baptists – including during the 17th August raid – that he cannot keep his Christian books and even his Bible in his home. Serin complained to Forum 18... Fines are expected... Raids, literature seizures and fines have continued across Uzbekistan.<sup>8</sup>

Case 2: Police and MSS secret police in Dashoguz in Turkmenistan have raided members of the Light of the East Church, Forum 18 News Service has learned. Two homes of church members were raided and religious literature including personal Bibles were seized. One church member was threatened with a 15-day jail term and deportation, even though he is a Turkmen citizen. During one raid, at a rehearsal of songs for the following Sunday's meeting for worship, officials stated that 'singing about God here is banned'. The church was also threatened that it might lose its state registration, thus making it illegal. A state religious affairs official who is also an imam told the church's Pastor Yuri Rozmetov that the Christian faith 'is wrong' and

---

<sup>8</sup> Mushfig Bayram, *UZBEKISTAN: Raids, religious literature seizures, passport confiscations and expulsions* (Forum 18 News Service: 1st September 2014): [www.forum18.org](http://www.forum18.org)

pressured him to become a Muslim. Meanwhile, the level of fines to punish individuals and communities for exercising their freedom of religion or belief has been increased.<sup>9</sup>

While the laws are supposed to treat all citizens of the country equally, in reality, restrictions on religious freedom work differently for different religious organisations and groups. For example, the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) has a special place as the traditional Russian church in the Central Asian countries. It is generally respected by the authorities and is well tolerated by the Muslim community because they do not consider the Russian Orthodox Church a threat to their faith. In terms of mission, the Russian Orthodox Church in Central Asia is mainly focused on 'inner mission' – for example, people inside the church in contrast to 'outer mission' – people outside the church.<sup>10</sup> Still, the Russian Orthodox Church would face more opposition and less tolerance if it ceased being the church only for the Russian people and started sharing the Gospel with ethnic people. Sadly, the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) speaks negatively of the Protestant churches, considering them to be sects and heretics, and on some occasions expressed a very intolerant attitude to Protestants in mass media campaigns and public lectures at universities. At the same time, the registered traditional Protestant churches, like Baptists and the registered non-traditional modern Protestant (Evangelical) churches, including Pentecostals and charismatics, face more restrictions and pressure from the state because of their missionary activities. Historically, Protestants in Russia were always very mission-minded and focused on sharing the Gospel of salvation and baptising people. Therefore, they would use every opportunity to share their faith with non-believers, even if it resulted in persecution.

However, the most marginalised and persecuted group in the Christian churches in Central Asia is the non-registered house churches. These have practically no right of exercising their belief either privately as a group of believers, or publicly. They are forced by circumstances and legislative restrictions to meet secretly, their homes are regularly searched by police, and they have to pay huge fines for 'illegal religious activities'. Nevertheless, this does not stop the activity of unregistered house churches in Central Asia.

Copyrighted Material

### *Hostility from a Predominantly Islamic Society*

Even today, the modern descendants of the ancient Central Asians know practically nothing about their Christian roots. Many Central Asian people

<sup>9</sup> Felix Corley, *TURKMENISTAN: 'Singing about God here is banned'* (Forum 18 News Service: 20th December 2013): [www.forum18.org](http://www.forum18.org)

<sup>10</sup> Olga Bogdanova, *Pravolaviye v Uzbekistane: Zhizn vopreki. (Orthodoxy in Uzbekistan: Life Notwithstanding)*: [www.taday.ru](http://www.taday.ru)

now consider only Islam to be an acceptable religion for them and view those who become Christians as traitors of their fathers' faith. When an ethnic person becomes a Christian, it is a matter of shame for the whole family, and he (or she) will face tremendous pressure from the family and the local Muslim community to return to Islam. All sorts of measures can be used to make a Christian believer leave his new faith, from threats to beatings and to complete rejection by the family. Local Muslim leaders make a special effort to set the community against not only the new Christian but also his entire family.

Case 1: U., 22, is a young university student in a Central Asian country. When she was 18 years old, she became a Christian and experienced severe persecution from her mother and other family members. She was locked in her room, beaten many times, her Bible was burnt and her clothes were cut into pieces so that she could not wear them. She managed to run away from her home but her family found her and beat her publicly. Her mother shaved all her hair and threatened to kill her. When her mother got sick, a local Muslim leader came and said to U. that it was her fault that her mother got sick and she must return to Islam so that her mother could get well. Finally U. left her family and now lives with her Christian friends.<sup>11</sup>

Case 2: A Christian family in a Central Asian country experienced persecution on two occasions from the local Muslim community when trying to bury their grandmother, and later another grandmother at a local cemetery. In both cases, a local Muslim leader called a large group of young men to come and stop the funeral. The family had to travel to different villages trying to bury their dead but faced the same opposition from the local Muslims. It did not matter whether the dead persons were Christians or Muslims. They were denied a decent burial because their family members were Christians.<sup>12</sup>

These two examples are just a tiny fraction of what is happening but they show the context in which Christian mission is carried out and the difficulties ethnic believers can face as a result of their conversion to Christianity. Still, many Central Asian people continue to come to Christ despite persecution.

### *The Positive Impact of Persecution and Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

Copyrighted Material

There are at least two positive results of growing restrictions on religious freedom and persecution:

1. It helps believers to stay spiritually alert. When your life and freedom are under constant threat, you will cling to the Lord as your main protector and to his Word in search of guidance and comfort. The church becomes a haven for Christian believers in a hostile world and it strengthens relationships.

---

<sup>11</sup> Personal communication.

<sup>12</sup> Personal communication.

2. It strengthens unity among churches of different denominations and nationalities. In Central Asia, joint prayers, evangelism and social projects, and interdenominational Christian conferences and gatherings, are quite common now. The churches are learning how to join their forces spiritually in prayer and publicly in defending their right for freedom of belief and religion. Church leaders work together on developing the safety measures designed to help and protect believers in their churches in owning Bibles and other Christian resources, and in studying Christian doctrine together and being equipped for Christian witness to the world through a well-planned system of church-based education.

### **The Rise and Growth of the National Church in Central Asia and a New Focus on Mission**

#### *The Transformation of the Church*

Starting at the close of the 1990s, a distinct transformation of the church began in Central Asia which still continues today. As a result of missionaries being pressed to move out of the region and the migration of the Russian and other non-ethnic populations, responsibility for the church's well-being and growth naturally passed to national church leaders. Ethnic believers and church leaders with a Muslim background experience more pressure and persecution, both from a predominantly Muslim society and the government, than Russian church leaders. Many ethnic Christians had to face persecution from the first days of their conversion. It was a seriously testing time for the national churches, but instead of getting weaker, the church became stronger as a result of growing restrictions on religious freedom and persecution.

#### *A New Style of Worship and Fellowship under the Influence of Central Asian Culture*

The increase in the number of ethnic believers affects the worship and fellowship style which becomes more adjusted to Central Asian culture, and the services become less structured. For Central Asian people, meeting in homes is a more natural and safer way to have fellowship, and it provides a good place for the informal sharing of the Gospel. While many Central Asian people would be unwilling to go to traditional church services in a church building, they are more open to come to a home fellowship where they can sit and eat together, hear testimonies and ask questions in an informal way. The number of believers meeting in homes across Central Asia is growing, and this has an impact on the mission as

well. There is a growing sense of identity and ‘ownership’ of the church among the Central Asian believers.

*Economic Hardship and its Impact  
on the Missionary Activities of the Church*

Speaking about the situation in Central Asia and the mission of the church, it is important to take economic factors into account. The church in Central Asia lives in a situation of daily economic hardship. Unemployment and a lack of sufficient income are common problems across Central Asia – in some countries like Tajikistan it is worse than in others. Churches and church leaders have to find creative ways to support themselves. One of these ways is through running small businesses. It is now common in Central Asia to meet pastors and other church leaders who work part- or even full-time as taxi drivers, builders, wedding photographers, computer specialists, small café owners, and even bakers and beekeepers. Although it may seem a distraction from ministry, this creates opportunities for more contacts with non-Christian people and for Christian witness. Economic hardship also opens doors for many needy families and gives opportunities to show God’s love through practical help and prayer for people’s needs.

*A New Focus on Mission*

The church in Central Asia is taking responsibility for the Great Commission both within and outside the Central Asian countries. It shows the same spirit as the Nestorian Christians – not in terms of theology and Christian doctrine, but in terms of zeal and passion for mission. There is a growing passion for other nations, missionaries are going to new fields, and various missionary projects are being born. This was well reflected recently at a large annual gathering of Central Asian church leaders. When making presentations on the situation in their countries, church leaders spoke mainly, not about the restrictions on religious freedom and persecution, but of the church’s different missionary activities and the goal of reaching all generations and nationalities for Christ within their own countries. They also spoke about the plans of churches to reach out to other nations with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is a well-expressed eagerness to spread the Good News inside the Central Asian region and outside it – to other nations.

**Conclusion**

The Church in Central Asia lives in a situation of growing restrictions on religious freedom. Only God knows the future. However, at present the church in Central Asia is growing stronger in spirit and numbers. The Silk Road is not only still open, but it is now open even wider for taking the

Gospel of Jesus Christ to other nations. The door to Central Asia becomes also a door for the Central Asian Christians to take the message of Jesus Christ to neighbouring nations. The early church missionaries who brought the Gospel to Central Asia would be proud to see the same missionary spirit in the present-day Christians in Central Asia. The Silk Road continues to serve as a route for spreading the Good News inside and outside Central Asia. Churches in the West have much to learn from the church in Central Asia in terms of commitment, maintaining Christian values, being witnesses to the Lord in the context of restrictions on religious freedom and a hostile environment, and flexibility in forms of worship and fellowship.

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale



# INDIA: RELIGIOUS POLARISATION IN A HINDU CONTEXT

Siga Arles

Dravidians claim to have lived in the Harappa Mohenjodaro valley with an ancient civilisation, as discovered by excavations. From Central Asia, the onslaught of a nomadic tyrant mob of Aryans drove the Dravidians who ended up settling in the Southern Indian Deccan Plateau – speaking Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Kannada and Tulu as the major languages. They were animists who worshipped the powers of nature, such as *prithvi* (earth), *jal* (water), *agni* (fire), *vayu* (air) and *akasha* (ether-atmosphere).<sup>1</sup> They held that the whole cosmic quest of the world and beyond started from the point of *panchabhuta* (five elements) which then manifested in an manner to form the life force and then, later, those five elements disintegrated to ensue as a celestial traverse at the *paramanu* (atom) level.

The Aryans who settled on the banks of the River Indus not only developed their Indus Valley civilisation but also the Vedas: *Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama*, *Atharva*.<sup>2</sup> From these Vedas was born a way of life with its social structure and faith content. The multiple views and ways were put through

---

<sup>1</sup> The Five Elements were known as *panchabhuta*. See Gautam Chatterjee's article 'Panchabhuta'. Field Research Support on Indological Studies: [www.ibiblio.org/gautam/hind0003.htm](http://www.ibiblio.org/gautam/hind0003.htm). Western authors also mention five powers or sources of energy or elements – such as Robert J. Abrahamson, 'The Healing Power of the Five Elements', mentioning Fire, Earth, Metal, Water, Wood. Juliet Heslewood, Jane Lydbury, Hugh Marshall, Tamara Capellaro and Alison McNeil, *Earth, Air, Fire and Water* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1989). See the Macbook, *Earth, Water and Fire*. Don Dupont and Brian Hillier, *Earth, Water, Fire, Air: A Suite for Voices, Narrator and Orff Instruments* (Memphis, TN: Musicraft Publications, 2005). Colleen Carroll, *The Elements: Earth Ice Fire Water (How Artists See)*, (Abbeville Press, 1999). Eric Hadley and Tessa Hadley, *Legends of Earth, Ice, Fire and Water* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985).

<sup>2</sup> Information on these is available at: <http://hinduism.iskcon.org/tradition/1106.htm> (accessed 1st November 2014).

1. The *Rigveda*, containing hymns to be recited by the *hotar*, or presiding priest;
2. The *Yajurveda*, containing formulas to be recited by the *adhvaryu* or officiating priest;
3. The *Samaveda*, containing formulas to be sung by the *udgatar* or priest that chants;
4. The *Atharvaveda*, a collection of spells and incantations, apotropaic charms and speculative hymns.

a fluid structure of a religion under a common title Hinduism. It is often thought of as an ocean of a religion – with multiple ways and paths, gods and goddesses. Hinduism spread into South India and engulfed the Dravidians within its orbit. Hinduism is not innately the religion of the Dravidians and hence they were much open to other influences. During the first millennium, between the fourth to the seventh centuries AD, there were numerous practices among the Tamil people which indicate that they were aware of Christian faith and its practices.<sup>3</sup> For instance, the pietistic practice of *kaavadi* had the human person as the vertical axis and the long wooden piece as the horizontal axis, together making the symbol of a cross. A devotee goes on a pilgrimage, repenting, praying, meditating, collecting alms and renewing one's spirituality during this process of carrying the *kaavadi*. Such a symbol of a cross was known to Dravidians as Christian faith had spread from St Thomas into the southern region, from Calicut to Chennai.

Though Hinduism spread widely among the Dravidians, many were open to the arrival of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and other faiths and converted to them. But some of them, certainly the tribal people in the jungles and hills of the Deccan Plateau, remained nature-worshipping animists.

Hinduism imposed a caste hierarchy which divided the human community into the *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya* and *Vysya* groups which arose from the head, shoulders and abdomen of Brahma and hence were considered high castes; the *Shudra* group which arose from the feet and hence were considered subservient and low caste, with the rest eliminated as the untouchable no-caste *mlechas*, currently known as *Dalits*. Approximately 13% of the Hindus belong to the upper three castes, 55% to the *Shudra*, and the rest to the *Dalit* sector.<sup>4</sup> Intellectual, political and economic power stayed with the 13% upper castes who dominated the majority *shudras* and *dalits*, who were not part of the essentially Hindu community. Similarly, the plains *adivasis* and hill tribes were of animistic background and outside the Hindu fold. But in time, the Hindus claimed the tribals, *dalits*, *shudras* and other backward communities (OBCs) as part of

<sup>3</sup> Sadhu Chellappa, along with Professor Deivanayagam and Dr Devakala, argued with evidences on this view. See their writings in Tamil from their Dravidian Religious Academy in Chennai. M. Deivanayagam, *Comparative Study of the Bible, Thirukkural and Saiva Siddhanta*, PhD thesis, Madras University, 1985; D. Devakala, *The Origin and Development of the Tamil Bhakti Movement*, PhD thesis, Madras University, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> Kancha Ilaiah and V.T. Rajshekar Shetty were outspoken in their interpretation and condemnation of the upper caste Hindu dominance over the rest of the people in India. See Kancha Ilaiah's books: *Why I am not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy* (Kolkata: Samya, 1996, Second Edition 2005); *Post-Hindu India: A Discourse on Dalit-Bahujan Socio-Spiritual and Scientific Revolution* (Delhi: Sage, 2009).

the Hindu community for the sake of votes in post-independent democratic India.

The majority status for the Hindu community, representing nearly 80% of the population, is disputed as a false claim by Kancha Ilaia. He counts only the 13% Brahmin- Kshatriya -Vysya groups as the real Hindu communities. Imposing Hinduism on the rest results from a concocted majoritarian image which has been skilfully manœuvred for political gain by developing ideologies and infrastructures.

### **Origin and Development of *Hindutva* (Hindu-ness)<sup>5</sup>**

Various factors have contributed to the emergence of Hindutva forces in India. The most prominent was 'the feeling of insecurity' created among upper caste and upper class Hindus under Muslim and British rule. Politically, economically, culturally and religiously, the Hindus felt threatened. Not only were there the denigrations of Hindu practices such as *sati*, caste, untouchability, child marriage, etc., but also the proselytising activities of Christian missionaries. The wounded psyche of the Hindus made them to seek a way to rediscover their glories and to meet the threats and challenges. The majoritarian communalism of the Hindu community organised itself into a religio-political block with an undergirding of both ideological and militant bases. The concept of Hindutva takes off from Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's definition of the Hindu.

### **The Birth of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh**

A Maharashtran Brahmin, V.D. Savarkar, codified a social and political doctrine and published its essential ideas in the book *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (1923). He affirmed that Hindus constitute a single nation and asked them to build up a Hindu-Rashtra in order to maintain, protect and promote the interests of the Hindu race.<sup>6</sup> Growing Muslim fundamentalism made demands on M.K. Gandhi wanting partition. The Arya Samaj (1875) and Hindu Maha Sabha (1914-15) proved insufficient to help the profusely divided Hindu society. Hence, Keshavrao Baliram Hedgewar (1889-1940) founded the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) at Nagpur in September 1925.<sup>7</sup> Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar reinforced Hindutva ideology in his *We or Our Nationhood Defined* (1939) and *Bunch of*

<sup>5</sup> See the report, 'The Challenge of Hindutva: An Indian Christian Response', in *Vidyajyoti*, Vol. 65, No.2, February 2001, 131-43.

<sup>6</sup> See Tapan Basu, et al, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags* (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Cf Walter K. Anderson and Shridhar D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism* (New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 1987).

*Thoughts* (1966).<sup>8</sup> He developed the concept of 'cultural nationalism' as distinct from 'territorial nationalism'. It grew into the all-embracing ideology of the RSS, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bharatiya Janata Party and their cohorts. From cultural nationalism, they look to others with a demand that

... the non-Hindu people in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and revere Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but the glorification of the Hindu nation, i.e. they must not only give up their attitude of intolerance and ingratitude towards this land and its age-long traditions, but must also cultivate the positive attitude of love and devotion instead; in one word, they must come to be foreigners or may stay in the country wholly subordinate to the Hindu nation claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights.<sup>9</sup>

V.D. Savarkar, K.B. Hedgewar and M.S. Golwalkar took their inspiration and model from the extreme nationalist movements of Europe, such as Nazism in Germany and Fascism in Italy, and tried to shape and structure the function and strategy of the Hindutva movement. RSS floated over fifty major frontal organisations through the years and later formed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)<sup>10</sup> as the political arm of the Hindutva movement. They grew to the point of becoming the ruling party in many Indian states as well as in its central government.

### Conversion and Anti-Conversion

The later developments are widely known. RSS and BJP systematically worked hard to promote Hindu fundamentalism which resulted in separatism, division and militancy. In the name of protecting Hindu identity, they fought against the constitutional right of freedom to convert. They sought to impose anti-conversion legislation.

The history of legislation restricting forcible conversion in India is not new. Anti-conversion laws were passed in several states; prominent among them were Raigarh State Conversion Act 1936, the Patna Freedom of Religion Act 1942, the Sarguja State Apostasy Act 1945, and the Udaipur State Anti-Conversion Act 1946. Similar laws were in force in Bikaner, Jodhpur, Kalahandi and Kota. All these were to prevent the speed of conversion of indigenous people to Christianity.

After Independence, the Indian Parliament took up the issue of conversion through legislation named the Indian Conversion (Regulation and Registration) Bill in 1954 and the Backward Communities (Religious Protection) Bill in 1960. Both bills were dropped and could not see the light

<sup>8</sup> M.S. Golwalker, *We or Our Nationhood Defined* (Nagpur, 1938).

<sup>9</sup> M.S. Golwalker, *We or Our Nationhood Defined* (Nagpur, 1938), 27.

<sup>10</sup> For details, see Yogendra K. Malik and V.B. Singh, *Hindu Nationalists in India: The Rise of Bharatiya Janata Party* (New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 1994).

of the day because of widespread resistance from secular and Christian bodies.

But in 1967 Orissa and, the following year, Madhya Pradesh enacted the Freedom of Religions Bills called the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act 1967 and Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantrya Adhiniyam 1968. Along the same lines ten years later, Arunachal Pradesh followed suit, prohibiting conversion of tribal people from their indigenous faith to Christianity by the use of force, allurement or fraudulent means. The Tamil Nadu government in 2002 joined the club by passing legislation banning conversion.

All these laws made conversion a cognisable offence under Sections 295A and 298 of the Indian Penal Code, inviting punishment to imprisonment and fines of variable amounts.

Madhya Pradesh, being a tribal-dominated state, witnessed large-scale conversions in Bastar and other tribal areas. The motive behind these conversions was taken as strengthening the British Empire in India and an attempt to destroy the unity of the Indian nation and people. The then Chief Minister Ravi Shankar Shukla appointed the Justice Bhavani Shankar Niyogi Commission to study Christian missionary activities in the state. The Commission submitted its report and recommendations to the government. But following pressure from the top leadership of the Congress party, the report was not made public. For a long time, the activities of church organisations and missionaries were going on unhindered until the Madhya Pradesh government passed a law in 1968.

In 1981, the Meenakshipuram episode occurred. The mass conversion of people of one community to Islam opened the eyes of the then Congress government headed by Mrs Indira Gandhi. The government immediately issued directives to the state governments to enact legislation along the lines of the one passed by Madhya Pradesh and Orissa prohibiting such conversions. It was the *Congress government and not the BJP* that issued this directive to the states.

The legislation enacted by various states at different times to check conversions were denounced by church organisations and Christian missions worldwide. To cite an example, the US Congressional Human Rights Caucus briefing on anti-conversion laws in India said:

The federal government in India has embraced religious pluralism, and indeed Article 25 of the Indian Constitution guarantees everyone the right and the freedom to preach, practice and propagate their religion. Yet many state governments have chosen to exploit religious tensions by enforcing or strengthening anti-conversion laws. Some of these laws have long been on the books, but the recent enforcement and even strengthening of these laws, particularly by the Hindu nationalist BJP, is alarming. These laws forbid 'forcible conversions' – which police and judges have interpreted to mean anything from charity by religious groups to claiming that God would be happier if someone converted to a new religion.

The Gujarat government in 2003 passed the anti-conversion law which Christians feared would be misused by 'Hindu extremists' to harass them. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) expressed concern over this law in which 'force', 'fraudulent means' and 'allurement' were very loosely defined. Alexa Papadouris, Advocacy Director of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said:

This law is extremely intrusive and entirely at odds with India's avowed respect for human rights, including the right to freedom of religion. It allows for substantial interference into the private process of an individual's conversion by a state government known for its extremist Hindu nationalist credentials. The requirement to explain the reasons for conversion to potential hostile officials is a significant block to religious freedom, and the authority given to District Magistrates to deny permission for a conversion 'ceremony' is completely unacceptable. It is also a nonsense to demand the 'time and date' of a person's conversion, which is a matter of their private conscience. We call upon the government of Gujarat to immediately repeal this law, and we call upon the international community to condemn what is India's worst anti-conversion law yet.<sup>11</sup>

What is the reality in states where such acts are passed? Two decades ago, when Arunachal Pradesh passed the Freedom of Indigenous Faith Bill, the number of Christian converts was not even 0.1% of the total population. Today, their number has crossed the 10% mark. Among the other north-eastern states, Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya have a Christian majority population ranging between 70% and 90%. In Manipur and Tripura, the majority tribal population is being converted to Christianity.<sup>12</sup>

The Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religions Act 1968 was amended on Wednesday, 10th July 2013 when the Madhya Pradesh state assembly passed a bill to prevent religious conversion by fraudulent means or allurements. The bill makes prior permission mandatory for those who want to change their religion or faith. It also makes provision for stringent jail terms for those resorting to conversion by offering inducements or using fraudulent means. It proposed a three- to four-year jail term or a fine up to Rs 100,000. Three Congress members raised objections – that it was trying to please the RSS and Hindutva *parivar*.

Other states such as Orissa, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka and Manipur also considered such legislation. In Rajasthan the then Governor Pratibha Patil did not consent to this bill.

In Tamil Nadu, the more the enlightenment arose through education during and after the British period in India, the more conspicuous became the anti-Brahmin outrage. With the rise of the Dravidian consciousness in the twentieth century, aroused by E.V. Ramaswamy Periyar among the

<sup>11</sup> See the notes compiled in [www.news Bharati.com/Encyc/2013/7/17/A-peep-into-the-history-of-anti-conversion-laws.aspx#.VF6hnjSUESo](http://www.news Bharati.com/Encyc/2013/7/17/A-peep-into-the-history-of-anti-conversion-laws.aspx#.VF6hnjSUESo)

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, See Felix Wilfred, 'Christians between Identity Politics and Nationalism: The Challenge of Hindutva', *Aikyatha*, December 2001, 6-22.

Tamil people, there arose an anti Brahmin mentality. This was shaped and sharpened by EVR Periyar and his Dravida Kazhagam (DK – Dravidian Party), which further grew into the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK – Dravidian Advancement Party) and became a popular ruling party in Tamilnadu. Its later split let the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) to compete to rule, but in the process, the anti-Brahmin nature was toned down and Brahmin Jayalalitha of Brahmin origin became the AIADMK Chief Minister of Tamilnadu and sided with the Hindutva movement, with political alignment with Bharatiya Janata Party. The ideological confusion that has set in has taken a big toll on the Tamil country. In 2002 she mooted the anti-conversion law in Tamilnadu which did not last long as the Christians went to prayer and the secularists rejected the imposition with political counter power under DMK and allies. The state continues to remain wide open for Christian growth with numerous Christian educational and medical institutions and non-governmental organisations serving the cause of the development of people.

The Indian National Congress which was assumed to be committed to secular democracy had not managed to lead the nation and particularly after Mrs Indira Gandhi's emergency rule in the 1970s and its impact, it lost from being the governing party at the centre. An alliance government was led by Janata Dal Secular for a short while. Though Congress regained power at the centre, it again lost out when it did not provide an acceptable candidate for leadership. Signs of nepotism did not please the masses. Corruption within the ranks led to a landslide victory to Bharatiya Janata Party in the recent election with Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister, despite his bad record from Gujarat state where he led a hate campaign against the Muslims and supported the anti-Christian activities.

### **Recent Developments in India:** **Reconversion, *Ghar Wapsi* and *Shuddhikaran***

Under the patronage of BJP and Prime Minister Modi, the RSS and VHP, along with multiple militant structures, have taken up the cause of the Hindu imposition of cultural nationalism, moral policing, attacks on churches and the demand of the reconversion of Muslim and Christian minorities, particularly in the tribal and *dalit* communities. The states of Orissa, Gujarat and Karnataka have suffered the most atrocities in the past two decades. Some recent news items indicate the reality:

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat says 're-conversion' will continue, at a meeting in Kolkata, supporting the controversial issue of the 're-conversion' of Muslims to Hinduism. He said that the people were originally Hindus who were converted into other faiths and are now being brought back home 'ghar



wapsi', which is not conversion. He proposed that the parliament should stop the debate but bring laws against conversion.<sup>13</sup>

VHP 're-converts' 225 in Gujarat and 35 in Kerala. 'As part of the ongoing 'ghar waapsi' (returning home) programme, the VHP today (Sunday) reconverted 225 people from the Christian community,' said Valsad District VHP chief Natu Patel, with the right-wing outfit. The 'reconversion' was voluntary. Patel said the VHP had organized a 'maha yagnya' (sacred fire ritual) for the 'purification' of the tribals before they were 'reconverted', and also gave each of them a copy of the Bhagwat Gita. Another VHP worker, Ahosk Sharma, said around 3,000 people gathered at the 'ghar waapsi' programme... Meanwhile, the 'reconversion' in Kerala took place in temples in Alappuzha and Kollam in the presence of the local VHP leaders. In Kanichanallur near Cheppad in Alappuzha district, 30 people from eight families, including five children, 'reconverted' to Hinduism, as did five members of a family in Anchal in Kollam district. The families were part of local Pentecostal churches.<sup>14</sup>

The State leader said that these families came on their own and requested to return to Hinduism. They expected more to reconvert and claimed that there were reconversion programmes at Kottayam, Punalur, Ernakulam and Kottarakkara. These incidents come against the backdrop of a raging debate over such programmes by Sangh Parivar groups in various parts of the country.

A controversy has erupted early this month in Agra when 100 were reconverted. It led to a ruckus in the Rajya Sabha, with the Opposition demanding a statement from the Prime Minister Narendra Modi... 39 tribals were reconverted in Bastar district of Chhattisgarh. BJP president Amit Shah said his party was against forced religious conversions and sought the support of other parties to a proposed anti-conversion bill.<sup>15</sup>

Tension in Agra as 20 lower caste women were lured with promises of money and health care and converted to Christianity. Over 250 muslims converted to Hinduism lured with promises of ration cards. Confusions prevailed.... Saffron outfits have planned a 'shuddhikaran yajna' (a ritual to purify) the returning converts. They warned that they will launch a state-wide agitation if the government did not act against those responsible for luring the Hindus to change religion.<sup>16</sup>

*Government unlikely to cross RSS hard line.* The NDA government may have been pushed into a corner in parliament over the conversion issue, but Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP ministers are unlikely to cross the RSS line drawn by its chief Mohan Bhagwat recently. In a meeting at Kolkata, Bhagwat said, 'We are trying to create a strong Hindu society. Those who have strayed, they have not gone on their own. They have been allured and have been forcibly taken away. When the thief is being caught and my property has been recovered, when I am taking back my own property, what

<sup>13</sup> *Deccan Herald*, 21st December 2014, 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Deccan Herald*, 22nd December 2014, 1.

<sup>15</sup> *Deccan Herald*, 22nd December 2014, 7.

<sup>16</sup> *Deccan Herald*, 23rd December 2014, 8.



is new in it?' He implied that the government and RSS were on the same page on the controversial issue of conversion. BJP chief Amit Shah repeated the view of Bhagwat in Chennai, and the government was ready to bring an anti-conversion law but that the so-called secular parties were opposing it. Parliamentary Affairs minister M. Venkaiah Naidu claimed that the NDA government or BJP had no role in conversion or reconversion and that the country was peaceful with them. He emphasized that the states were free to act if they came across instances of forceful conversions in their jurisdiction. He hinted that the centre was not responsible and will not act on the issue!<sup>17</sup>

*Shiv Sena justifies conversions...* The Shiv Sena mouthpiece Saamna said in an editorial: 'Till yesterday, Hindus were converted to Muslims. Then, nobody said those were done forcibly or through enticement. But now when the Ganga has started flowing in reverse, the pseudo secularists are saying the conversions are not right.'

*Centre playing divisive politics: Janata Parivar.* Erstwhile Janata Parivar leaders Lalu Yadav, Nitish Kumar, Mulayam Singh Yadav and H.D. Deve Gowda came on one platform to target Prime Minister Narendra Modi... as the Samajwadi Janata Dal... holding a 'mahadharna' or massive protest. They called for larger unity in the opposition and accused BJP and Modi of playing divisive politics and deceiving people by not keeping to their party's poll promises. Nitish Kumar said, 'From our identities as separate parties, we have to merge into a single party. An agreement has been reached on this. Mulayam Singhji has to work out the modalities. Let us take a vow. We should contact others as well. Let us make a comprehensive Opposition, setting aside our prejudices.'<sup>18</sup>

VHP patron Ashok Singhal lamented that the 'communal' tag is fixed on them! He defended conversion. He saw nothing wrong in the 'ghar waapsi' programme. He said that the suppression of the Hindu community will have to end... VHP and RSS will continue to push for home-coming programmes through which they claim to get back Hindus converted to become Muslims or Christians... VHP proposed to hold a mass reconversion programme and bring back 4,000 into the Hindu fold. (Reported by the Deccan Herald on Christmas Day 2014!)

On the last day of November, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was on a visit to Nagaland when he received a memorandum from church leaders seeking his intervention to put an end to the renewed attacks on Christians reported from across the country. In what seemed to be an act of defiance, the very next day the altar at the St Sebastian's Church in the national capital was burnt to cinders. And no, it wasn't a short circuit that did it. The incident triggered outrage and several thousand Christians gheraoed the Delhi police headquarter the next day to protest.<sup>19</sup>

Despite Prime Minister Narendra Modi's caution to BJP leaders against controversial remarks, party MP Sakshi Maharaj from Uttar Pradesh (Unnao) has kicked up a row by asking Hindu women to 'ignore' family planning

<sup>17</sup> *Deccan Herald*, 23rd December 2014, 8.

<sup>18</sup> *Deccan Herald*, 23rd December 2014, 8.

<sup>19</sup> *Outlook*, 29th December 2015, 24.

programmes and give birth to 'a minimum of four children' to ensure the existence of the community. He proposed that two of the children should be sent to religious ashrams and one to the defence forces.

Over 150 sadhus and saints from all over UP attended the meeting where they all emphasized the importance and appropriateness of the 'ghar wapsi' programme.<sup>20</sup>

Modi did not wish to sidetrack the economic development agenda and did not wish to give the impression of siding with a Hindu agenda. The BJP National Secretary Shrikant Sharma distanced the party from Maharaj's comments as his private view and BJP instructed its leaders to resist from such comments. The BJP President Amit Shah also blamed Maharaj for his personal view and said that when MLAs and MPs make such statements, it damages the BJP.<sup>21</sup>

What looms large is the mistaken tendency of the Hindutva militants to see others as enemies of India. They flaunt a hate campaign, particularly among the youth through interference with school curricula. Father Joy Thomas of the Fellowship of Indian Missiologists quoted:

Christian missionaries are identified among the five biggest enemies of Hindus in a pamphlet distributed at the World Hindu Congress 2014 which has just ended in Delhi. The five 'sworn enemies of Hindus' highlighted in the text are: Muslims, Marxists, Missionaries, Materialism and Macaulayism. 'The combination of forces and anti-Hindus is weakening Indian society and therefore the faithful are invited to counter the cultural system in force,' the propaganda said. The pamphlet defines Islam as 'poisonous', criticizes cultural and religious pluralism and the approach of Christian missionaries who 'wickedly introduce the value system of their own western societies'. Lord Macaulay was instrumental in the introduction of English as the medium (called Macaulayism) which the Hindu fundamentalists especially hold as responsible for liquidating indigenous culture. Over 1,500 delegates from 40 countries attended the World Hindu Congress in 2014. (Source: Indian Express).

### What Should be the Christian Response?

Most Christians affirm their faith that, when the church is persecuted, it will prune the church and her witness; the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church! They resort to prayer, living with humility, and concentrating on acts of service to the poor and downtrodden. Silent protests, *dharnas*, appeals to the governors and such like have become common. Writing articles and news reports in the media is on the increase. Certain groups have set up mechanisms to relay information of persecution all over the country to arouse prayer and action. Christians ought to respond positively with goodwill, patriotism and service.

<sup>20</sup> *Deccan Herald*, 8th January 2015.

<sup>21</sup> *Deccan Herald*, 9th January 2015, 8.

A theology of Christian response in such a context of hatred and fundamentalism is being explored, as exemplified by the Fellowship of Indian Missiologists, who in their conference at Punalur in 2011 took the theme 'Christian Life in a World of Growing Violence'. Topics of the papers indicate the relevance of what is being explored: A Theology of Violence! Engaging Christian Mission in a Violent World (Antony Kalliath), The Challenge of Violence for Christian Ministry Today (Joy Thomas), Violence and the Biblical Concept of Reconciliation: A Missiological Reflection (Ernest Talibuddin), Non-Violence as a Response to Violence (Joseph Mattam), *Ahimsa: A Gandhian Weapon Against Violence* (Paul Vellarackal).<sup>22</sup>

The latest news release is indicative of the global response to the Indian situation of religious polarisation in a Hindu context. The first American President to have graced the Republic Day celebrations at Delhi on 26th January 2015, Barack Obama, gave a parting shot responding to the *ghar wapsi* and reconversion issues in India, saying:

India will succeed as long as it is not splintered along the lines of religious faith, as long as it is not splintered along any lines, and it is unified as one nation.<sup>23</sup>

He further stated what should be resounded all across India and our world:

Your (Constitution's) Article 25 says all people are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and have the right to freely profess and practice and propagate religion. In both our countries (India and the US), in all countries, upholding freedom of religion is the utmost responsibility of the government, but also the responsibility of every person.<sup>24</sup>

Would to God that India shall remain a secular democracy with peace, freedom and fraternity for its large percentage of humanity! Would to God that the Indian Christian community remain salt, light and leaven to influence positively in the way of the cross to transform our world... !

Copyrighted Material

<sup>22</sup> Compilation of the conference papers and reports in Siga Arles and Joy Thomas (eds), *Christian Mission in the Midst of Violence* (Bangalore: Fellowship of Indian Missiologists & Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> *Deccan Herald*, 28th January 2015, 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Deccan Herald*, 28th January 2015, 1.

# MISSION AND PERSECUTION – PARALLEL STORIES: THE STATE OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN BURMA

Kristin Storaker

## Introduction

Promoting religious and ethnic homogeneity in one of the world's most diverse societies is a recipe for trouble. And trouble describes the history of Burma<sup>1</sup> well – especially when it comes to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). Since the 1960s, the Burmese government has attempted to protect 'race and religion', and now civic society is joining in on the act. Ever since Independence in 1948, Burma has been plagued by civil wars and national conflicts. The Burmese regime is responsible for one of the worst human rights crises in the world where discrimination and persecution based on religion and ethnicity are rampant.

This chapter examines the state of the Christian minority through a FoRB perspective. I include references to other religious groups, mainly the Muslim minority,<sup>2</sup> where relevant. Due to space limitations, I will not go into the same amount of detail. I include some history to build an understanding of the current situation, but the main focus of this chapter is on independent Burma, both the military regime from 1962-2010, and the current nominally civilian government.

### *A defining moment*

The people of Burma are currently living through a defining moment in the history of their nation. After the 2010 election, the newly elected and nominally civilian government started to make fragile progress towards democracy. Since then, many positive steps have been taken. When it comes to FoRB, there have been some changes, but the sum of these changes does not seem to have improved the overall FoRB situation. Rather, discrimination and violence that were previously monopolised by the state are now increasing in civic society. Where the state has eased some of these restrictions, civic society is creating new ones. A movement

---

<sup>1</sup> I use 'Burma' instead of 'Myanmar', which is the official name. This is because many Burmese pro-democracy activists still prefer 'Burma'. In direct quotations, 'Myanmar' may be used.

<sup>2</sup> The Rohingya people are one of the most persecuted groups in the world. Several excellent reports are written on their situation – for example, *Policies of persecution* (2014) by Fortify Rights.

of extremist, violent Buddhist nationalists, whose goal is to protect the Burman<sup>3</sup> race and the Buddhist religion, poses a very serious threat to the religious and ethnic minorities of the country.

Things are changing rapidly in Burma, and sometimes it is difficult to assess whether information from a few years ago is still valid today. However, it is important to remember that the consequences of five decades (1962-2010) of brutal discrimination and persecution do not disappear from society overnight. According to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom's 2014 report: 'Political reforms in Burma have not improved legal protections for religious freedom', and the US State Department continues to designate Burma as a 'country of particular concern'. Tin Tin Nyo, general secretary of Women's League of Burma, describes the situation like this: 'When people talk about Myanmar's transition, they are not referring to the country's ethnic communities. In these areas, enjoyment of fundamental human rights and justice for crimes is as remote as ever.'<sup>4</sup>

## Historical background

### *Ethnic and religious demography*

The government of Burma recognises eight major national ethnicities: Burman, Shan, Mon, Karenni, Karen, Chin, Kachin and Rakhine. These eight can again be divided in 135 different sub-ethnic groups, many of which have their own languages.<sup>5</sup> The Rohingya people also live in Burma, but are not recognised as one of the national ethnicities, even though many of them have lived there for centuries. The Burman ethnic group makes up the majority<sup>6</sup> of the population. They have dominated the country with its culture, language (Burmese) and religion (Theravada Buddhism) ever since the Burman King Anawrahta established the first Burmese Empire in Pagan in the eleventh century.

Copyrighted Material

<sup>3</sup> The term 'Burman' refers to the dominant ethnic group, sometimes also called 'Bamar'. The term 'Burmese' refers to all the citizens of Burma, or as an adjective to describe Burma as a whole.

<sup>4</sup> [www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/11/sexual-violence-continues-myanmar-2014112411115794396.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/11/sexual-violence-continues-myanmar-2014112411115794396.html) (accessed 30th November 2014).

<sup>5</sup> These are the official numbers. Many, especially from ethnic minorities, contest them.

<sup>6</sup> According to an official census from 1983, the Burman people make up 69% of the population. Many think this number is exaggerated in favour of the Burmans and believe the actual number to be closer to 60%. A new census was carried out in 2014, but the results were not available at the time of writing.

The ethnic minorities make up approximately 40% of the population,<sup>7</sup> many of whom adhere to Christianity and Islam. It is difficult to present accurate statistics since the numbers vary from source to source. The official statistics from the regime claim that the population is 89% Buddhist, 4% Christian, 4% Muslim, 1% Animist and 2% other. Benedict Rogers, a respected Burma expert and activist who has worked with FoRB and human rights in Burma for almost two decades, believes the number of non-Buddhists to be closer to 30%. *Operation World* (2010) says that Christians make up 9% of the population, which is 4.5 million people. Most of them are Baptists, but there are also significant groups of Catholics and Anglicans.<sup>8</sup> The Chin and the Kachin are around 90% Christian, the Karen and Karenni are approximately 40% Christian, and there are some Christians among the Shan people as well.<sup>9</sup> The Rohyinga people in Arakan state are mainly Muslim and live together with the Rakhine people, who are mainly Buddhist. The Rohyngas are severely discriminated against, by both state and civic society. They are denied citizenship and are thus without protection or rights that normal citizens enjoy. The plight of the Rohyinga people has been referred to as ‘ethnocide’ and ‘crimes against humanity’ by several international organisations and actors, and poses a huge obstacle to the future of the democratisation process.<sup>10</sup>

### *Origins of Christianity in Burma*

Christianity started spreading among the local people of Burma in the first half of the nineteenth century. The American Baptist couple Adoniram and Ann Judson arrived in Yangon in 1813.<sup>11</sup> The Judsons’ started their work and after six years, in 1819, they baptised their first convert to Christianity. Their initial focus was the majority Burman people. However, they had little success since the Burmans stood firm in their Buddhist faith. In 1828, they baptised the first Karen, which opened the door to the Karen people in the east of Burma. There they had much more success. The Karen people

<sup>7</sup> Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO), *Threats to our existence* (unpublished report, 2012), 2.

<sup>8</sup> According to *Operation World* (2010), Christians in Burma consist of 2.3 million Protestants, 1.16 million independent, 64,000 Anglicans, 672,000 Catholics and 356,000 others.

<sup>9</sup> The Naga people, a sub-ethnic group living in the north-west of Burma in Kachin state and Sagaing division, are also predominantly Christian.

<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Watch, *All you can do is pray* (unpublished report, 2013) 1; United to end genocide, *Marching to genocide in Burma* (unpublished report, 2014) 1.

<sup>11</sup> The Judsons’ may be the best-known and most successful missionaries to have worked in Burma, but they were not the first. There were some attempts at missionary work by Portuguese Catholics during the 16th and 17th centuries, while Italian Catholics arrived in the 18th century. For more on this, see Lian H. Sakhong’s *In Search of a Chin Identity*, chap 5.

welcomed the missionaries warmly. Traditional Karen teachings are surprisingly similar to Genesis in the Old Testament. They believed in one God, the creator of universe, called Y'wa – similar to the Hebrew word for God Yaweh.<sup>12</sup> Y'wa had given the Karens a golden book containing the truths of life. The book had been lost, but one day a white brother would return it to them. When Adoniram Judson came with the Bible, many Karen saw it as the fulfilment of their prophecy – and hence converted to Christianity.<sup>13</sup>

In 1858, after thirty years of Christianity, the Karen started their own missionary work, mainly among the Kachin people in the north of Burma.<sup>14</sup> Western missionaries joined them as well. In 1899, American Baptist missionaries entered the Chin state in the west, where they had great success. The Kachin also had a monotheistic tradition and a legend of a lost book. The Chin also shared theological similarities with Christianity, such as a belief in a supreme and eternal God, though they also believed in several 'minor' guardian gods and evil spirits.<sup>15</sup> Today, the Chin and Kachin people are predominantly Christian. The Karen and Karenni also have a large Christian population. Christianity has come to be a leading factor in the identity of many of these ethnic minorities.

In 1966, the military regime expelled all foreign missionaries from the country, thus leaving a young church to develop on its own.

### Nationalism

Ethnicity and religion are closely linked and play important roles in Burma. The military regime has used religion, closely intertwined with ethnicity, as a marker for discrimination and persecution ever since it took power in a coup d'état in 1962. They have carried out a rampant 'burmanisation process', a merciless policy of forced assimilation in the name of nation-building. The essence of 'burmanisation' is captured in the slogan 'One race, one language, one religion' – which means Burman, Burmese and Buddhism.<sup>16</sup> Even though Burma has no official state religion, Theravada Buddhism is promoted over other religions, and non-Buddhists are

<sup>12</sup> There are several discussions about the origins of the Karen's beliefs. Some argue that the Karen must have been in contact with Jews or Christian missionaries before they settled in Burma; others that the Karen are one of the lost tribes of Jerusalem; others again are convinced that God planted the monotheistic belief and the Genesis-like stories in the Karen people (B. Rogers, *A land without evil* (UK: Monarch, 2004), 44).

<sup>13</sup> Rogers, *A land without evil*, 39-59.

<sup>14</sup> Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), *Carrying the Cross* (unpublished report, 2007), 12-14.

<sup>15</sup> L.H. Sakhong, *In search of Chin identity* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2003), xviii, 22-24; Rogers, *A land without evil*, 51.

<sup>16</sup> CHRO, *Threats to our existence*, 6-11.

commonly regarded with suspicion. Buddhism has been used as a political tool to create a Burmese national identity, hence the expression ‘To be Myanmar is to be Buddhist’.<sup>17</sup> This saying can be traced all the way back to the eleventh century and King Anawrahta’s first Burmese empire.<sup>18</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, nationalism bloomed again, and Buddhist monks and university students took the lead in protests against British colonial rule. Aung San emerged as a national independence hero who actually managed to unite some of the different ethnic groups in the country. His policy was built on the principle ‘unity in diversity’, and he initiated the Panglong agreement which envisioned a federation of ethnic groups built on the principle of equality.<sup>19</sup> Regrettably, ‘unity in diversity’ died with Aung San when he was assassinated in 1947. One year later, in 1948, Burma gained its independence. Instead of the unifying Aung San, the nationalist U Nu became Burma’s first Prime Minister. U Nu’s ruling principle was the complete opposite, namely ‘unity in culture’. Buddhist nationalism bloomed under his rule and laid the foundation for the military regime’s ‘burmanisation process’.<sup>20</sup>

U Nu’s break with the Panglong Agreement and his attempt to make Buddhism the state religion gave rise to the armed rebellion of Kachin and Chin in the 1960s.<sup>21</sup> Several other ethnic groups engaged in armed resistance, including the Karen and Karenni. Ethnic areas with armed resistance groups have had a higher degree of attacks against the Christian population than areas with ceasefire agreements. In 2013, the nominally civilian government reached a ceasefire agreement with all major non-state armed groups, except for the Kachin.<sup>22 23</sup> It is not surprising, then, that there have been several violent attacks in Kachin state the last couple of years, whereas there have been fewer violent attacks in areas with ceasefire agreements.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> CSW, *Carrying the Cross*, 20-22.

<sup>18</sup> CHRO, *Threats to our existence*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Shan, Kachin and Chin were parties to the agreement, while the Karen were only observers.

<sup>20</sup> CHRO, *Threats to our existence*, 6-9.

<sup>21</sup> CHRO, *Threats to our existence*, 7-9.

<sup>22</sup> The Kachin Independence Organization agreed to a ceasefire with the Burmese government in 1994. This agreement was broken in 2011. More than 100,000 Kachin have been displaced, and 200 villages and 66 churches destroyed (CSW, *Briefing. Burma, Visit to Kachin state* (unpublished report, 2009), 18: <http://mmpeacemonitor.org/background/background-overview> (accessed 30th November 2014)).

<sup>23</sup> Human Rights Watch, *World report: Burma* (unpublished report, 2014): <http://mmpeacemonitor.org/background/background-overview>

<sup>24</sup> [www.uscifr.gov/countries/burma](http://www.uscifr.gov/countries/burma) (accessed 30th November 2014)



### *Mission and Persecution – Parallel Stories*

The expansion of Christian mission coincided with religious persecution. In 1820, Adoniram Judson went to the Burmese monarch to request freedom of religion for the citizens of Burma. The response he received was the opposite, namely, a promise of persecution and suffering for Christian converts. The monarch upheld his promise, and ever since, persecution of Christians has been widespread in Burma.<sup>25</sup> One can thus say that the persecution story is a parallel to the missionary story, and that it illustrates the words of Jesus: 'If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.'<sup>26</sup>

Christianity in Burma has grown, in spite of persecution, restrictions on mission and the ban on foreign missionaries. This is reflected in the increase of theological training institutes, from 90 in 2000 to over 200 in 2009. There are many national missionaries and the national mission movement is growing. There is also an increasing response and interest from the Buddhist majority, especially monks, some of whom study the Bible and listen to Christian radio.<sup>27</sup>

### **Current Situation**

#### *Buddhism as a Political Tool to Oppress*

The Constitution from 2008 grants freedom of religion of belief to a certain degree. As mentioned, there is no official state religion, but the Constitution grants Buddhism a 'special position'. Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Animism are recognised as 'religions existing in the Union of the date of coming into force of the State Constitution'. The Constitution protects citizens' right to develop the religion they possess, but it does not explicitly protect the right to change one's religion or faith – which is a core value of international FoRB. The Constitution also states that 'the Union may assist and protect religions it recognises to its utmost'.<sup>28</sup> This is interesting with respect to the regime's long-standing attempt to protect and promote Buddhism – now also supported by certain civic society groups, such as the Buddhist nationalist movement, which I will address in more detail in 3.3 below. According to international norms, FoRB protects adherents of all religions, worldviews and beliefs of all sorts, not only favoured religions. Despite the fact that Buddhism is accorded a 'special position' in the Constitution, it does not mean the state respects the rights

<sup>25</sup> CSW, *Carrying the Cross*, 13.

<sup>26</sup> John 15:20 (NIV).

<sup>27</sup> Mandryk, *Operation World*, 609-11.

<sup>28</sup> [www.burmalibrary.org/docs5/Myanmar\\_Constitution-2008-en.pdf](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs5/Myanmar_Constitution-2008-en.pdf) (accessed 30th November 2014)

of the practitioners of Buddhism; namely Buddhists. Rather, the state uses Buddhism as a political tool to advance its agenda of ‘burmanisation’. Buddhists also suffer a lack of FoRB, and many Buddhist monks and monasteries are under strict control and surveillance by the government.<sup>29</sup>

There is no doubt that religious minorities have been particularly targeted by the military regime as well as by the current government. Violations are so egregious and prevalent that it is difficult to present the full picture in this chapter. The examples of violations below are taken from reports and literature from 2007 to the time of writing.

To illustrate the mechanisms contributing to abuses against Christians of the ethnic minorities, I will use a model developed by Johan Candelin.<sup>30</sup> This model divides violations of FoRB into three phases: 1) disinformation, 2) discrimination, and 3) violent persecution. The three phases may overlap or occur at the same time.

### DISINFORMATION

The military regime portrayed Christianity as a foreign religion and Christians as spies and a threat to the homogeneous identity of Burma. Christianity has been called ‘the C-virus’, indicating that it is something sickening to society.<sup>31</sup> Benedict Rogers documents the lies planted by the regime in the report *Carrying the Cross* from 2007. In Chin state, for example, local authorities claim they face three main challenges, the so-called ‘ABC’: AIDS, Hepatitis B and Christianity.

Another example is a document entitled ‘Programme to destroy the Christian religion’, allegedly from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. It consists of seventeen points that lay down a plan on how to reduce Christianity. It contains direct lies, such as ‘... God only loves the twelve tribes of Israel and does not love all the people in the rest of the world’. Disinformation like this easily poisons a society with rumours, prejudice and religious hatred.<sup>32</sup> An example of the fact that Candelin’s three phases of FoRB violations both can overlap and occur at the same time is illustrated in this document. Some points directly encourage discrimination, such as: ‘There shall be no home where the Christian religion is practised’, ‘There shall be no Christian preaching/evangelism on an organised basis’, and ‘If anyone discovers Christians evangelising in the countryside, they are to report it to the authorities and those who are caught evangelising will be put in prison’.<sup>33</sup> In Chin state, an even more extreme version of the document has been found, where authorities instruct Buddhists to take up

<sup>29</sup> [www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/Detained\\_monks.pdf](http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/Detained_monks.pdf) (accessed 30th November 2014); [www.uscifr.gov/countries/burma](http://www.uscifr.gov/countries/burma)

<sup>30</sup> Johan Candelin is the former president of the World Evangelical Alliance.

<sup>31</sup> Mandryk, J., *Operation World* (USA: Biblica Publishing, 2010), 609-611.

<sup>32</sup> CSW, *Carrying the Cross*, 17-18.

<sup>33</sup> CSW, *Carrying the Cross*, 17-18.

violent persecution: 'Attack Christians by means of both non-violence and violence.'<sup>34</sup> These texts are explicitly designed to stir up religious hatred and violence. It is no surprise that Chin state has experienced some of the most brutal attacks on the Christian population.

#### DISCRIMINATION

Restrictions on building and maintaining churches, on services and other Christian meetings, on evangelism and the promotion of Christians in the military and civilian government are some of the main types of discrimination.

Restrictions regarding permission to build and maintain churches have been, and continue to be, difficult. An anonymous pastor cited in a 2012 report by Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) verifies this: 'If you want to construct a church building, permission must be obtained from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. You will never get it even if you ask...'<sup>35</sup> The military regime has closed down many churches, and there are numerous reports of the Burmese Army interrupting Sunday services. Even schools and orphanages run by Christians have been shut down.<sup>36</sup> This continues to be a problem especially in Kachin state.<sup>37</sup>

Discrimination and denial of promotion in the military and in civil service are rampant. Generally, Christians are denied positions of power and influence.<sup>38</sup> In Chin state, Burman Buddhists hold the overwhelming majority of power positions. At Chin state level Christians hold only 14% of posts as departmental heads.<sup>39</sup>

#### VIOLENT PERSECUTION

Since the 1990s, the Burmese Army has destroyed or burned down several thousand Christian villages.<sup>40</sup> Over one million people have been internally displaced, many of whom are Christians. Many are still unable to return home. Numerous people have been killed and children forcibly conscripted into the military. Many have been arbitrarily arrested for practising their faith and falsely accused of engaging in political activities. Churches and big crosses erected on mountaintops have been demolished and Christians violently attacked, especially in Chin, Kachin, Karen and Karenni states.<sup>41</sup> One pastor describes the torture he experienced while in prison: 'They

<sup>34</sup> CSW, *Carrying the Cross*, 17-18.

<sup>35</sup> CHRO, *Threats to our existence*, 48.

<sup>36</sup> CHRO, *Threats to our existence*, 44-66.

<sup>37</sup> [www.uscifr.gov/countries/burma](http://www.uscifr.gov/countries/burma)

<sup>38</sup> Mandryk, *Operation World*, 609-11; CSW, *Carrying the Cross*, 15-30.

<sup>39</sup> CHRO, *Threats to our existence*, 46-47.

<sup>40</sup> Mandryk, *Operation World*, 609-611; CSW, *Carrying the Cross*, 11.

<sup>41</sup> CSW, *Carrying the Cross*, 30-31.

punched us in the face. They used a stick to hit our backs. They kicked our back, head and face...<sup>42</sup> Especially in Kachin state, the violations continue.<sup>43</sup>

Sexual violence is used as a weapon against ethnic Christians. In Kachin, a woman in a church was gang raped and tortured by the Burmese Army in May 2012.<sup>44</sup> There are credible allegations that the Burmese Army encourages or condones their soldiers to rape Chin women. Buddhist Burman soldiers have been offered financial rewards or career incentives to marry and convert Christian Chin or Kachin women.<sup>45</sup> Since 2010 to 2014, the Women's League of Burma has documented at least 118 incidents of sexual violence or attempts of sexual assaults by Burmese Army against ethnic women. In 2014 alone, sexual violence and attempted sexual violence was reported in Chin, Karenni, Kachin, Karen, Mon and Shan states. Note that these are only the documented cases; the actual number is most likely much higher.<sup>46</sup>

The Burmese Army has forced local Christians to destroy churches and instead build Buddhist pagodas or Burmese Army camps. An anonymous Chin villager says, 'I had to do forced labour for building the pagoda at least 15 times... I missed school so many times because of it.'<sup>47</sup> Forced labour or mandatory meetings would often take place on Sundays or other religious holidays in order to prevent Christians from going to church. Many have also been forced to work as military porters for the Burmese Army – carrying their guns and supplies, fighting in the frontline or being used as human shields and minesweepers.<sup>48</sup>

The regime has actively engaged in trying to convert Christians to Buddhism, by force or by offering incentives such as money, protection, education or work.<sup>49</sup> Especially in Chin and Kachin states, the regime has sent Buddhist monks to live and preach among the population, in addition to tearing down churches and replacing them with Buddhist pagodas. Salai Bawi Lian Mang describes the situation: 'Converts to Buddhism are rewarded by exemption from forced labour, and receive a monthly stipend and education opportunities plus rice, sugar, cooking oil and basic commodities at especially low prices, while Christians face discrimination,

<sup>42</sup> CSW, *Carrying the Cross*, 31. Copyrighted Material

<sup>43</sup> [www.uscifr.gov/countries/burma](http://www.uscifr.gov/countries/burma)

<sup>44</sup> <http://womenofburma.org/statement-from-kachin-women-association-thailand-concerning-the-gang-rape-in-church-in-pang-wa> (accessed 30th November 2014).

<sup>45</sup> [www.uscifr.gov/reports-briefs/annual-report/2010-annual-report](http://www.uscifr.gov/reports-briefs/annual-report/2010-annual-report) (accessed 30th November 2014); Rogers, *Carrying the Cross*, 27.

<sup>46</sup> <http://womenofburma.org/if-they-had-hope-they-would-speak> (accessed 30th November 2014)

<sup>47</sup> CHRO, *Threats to our existence*, 77.

<sup>48</sup> [www.uscifr.gov/reports-briefs/annual-report/2012-annual-report](http://www.uscifr.gov/reports-briefs/annual-report/2012-annual-report) (accessed 30th November 2014); CHRO, *Threats to our existence*, 71-74.

<sup>49</sup> [www.uscifr.gov/reports-briefs/annual-report/2010-annual-report](http://www.uscifr.gov/reports-briefs/annual-report/2010-annual-report)

intimidation and insult.<sup>50</sup> CHRO has documented conversion by force or allurements in government boarding schools, so-called Na Ta La schools, primarily targeted at ethnic and religious minorities. More than a third of the students who attend Na Ta La schools are Chin, which suggests that Chin are specifically targeted for these schools. All students who graduate from the Na Ta La schools are guaranteed a government job – if he or she is a Buddhist or a convert to Buddhism.<sup>51</sup>

The regime has been sly in their campaign against the Christian minorities. In Chin state, in the 1990s, the regime brought in large amounts of a very addictive and toxic type of liquor called ‘OB’. This liquor was sold on the streets to young people, especially on Sundays, in order to negatively influence church attendance and the very culture of Chin Christians. The same tactic is believed to have been used in Kachin state, only with drugs instead of liquor.<sup>52</sup>

### *One Step Forward... An Easing of Government Restrictions*

There are some bright spots, however, and it is important to highlight these as well. Positive changes are seen in large cities, such as Yangon, and in ethnic areas where ceasefire agreements are in place. This is reflected by less trouble for Christians with registration of churches and permission to hold religious meetings. According to CHRO, Christmas 2013 was the first Christmas when local churches in Chin state could celebrate without seeking permission. Restrictions on evangelisation have also been reduced, at least for foreign missionaries. The 1966 prohibition of foreign missionaries has been eased and, since 2013, some foreign religious groups have been granted access to operate inside Burma. Previous strict censorship and prohibitions on religious materials, including the Bible, have been lessened. The prohibition on Christians using certain Pali words, the language of Buddhism, is no longer active. In Kachin state, Christian groups still have to submit religious material to a censorship committee prior to publication.<sup>53</sup>

In November 2014, the Roman Catholic Church celebrated its 500th anniversary in Burma. Tens of thousands took part in the celebrations in Yangon. Catholicism first came to Burma in 1511, which means that the actual 500th anniversary took place in 2011. At that time, the organisers did not dare to throw a big celebration, whereas in 2014 they felt more secure.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>50</sup> CSW, *Carrying the Cross*, 22.

<sup>51</sup> CHRO, *Threats to our existence*, 96-108.

<sup>52</sup> CSW, *Carrying the Cross*, 37; CSW, *Briefing, Burma, Visit to Kachin State* (unpublished report, 2009), 10.

<sup>53</sup> [www.uscifr.gov/countries/burma](http://www.uscifr.gov/countries/burma)

<sup>54</sup> [www.irrawaddy.org/burma/multimedia-burma/burmas-catholics-celebrate-500th-jubilee-events-rangoon.html/nggallery/page/8](http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/multimedia-burma/burmas-catholics-celebrate-500th-jubilee-events-rangoon.html/nggallery/page/8) (accessed 30th November 2014).

### *Two Steps Back... Buddhist Nationalism on the Rise*

Whereas FoRB took one step forward with the easing of some government restrictions, it took two steps back with the rise of radical Buddhist nationalism. Social hostilities against religious minorities have increased dramatically in the past few years. With increased freedom of speech, hate speech has become a salient challenge. From 2011 to 2012, Burma climbed from 5.5 to 7.4 points on the Pew Research Center's scale of social hostilities. The scale goes from 0-10, where 10 equals very severe persecution.<sup>55</sup> The nationalism of the 19th century is blooming again, only this time it carries the heritage of the military regime's decades of disinformation, discrimination and violent acts against religious minorities.

A radical movement of Buddhist nationalists has emerged, with 'The 969 movement'<sup>56</sup> in the ascendant. It mobilises for the protection of race and religion – a Buddhist Burma. The leader of The 969 movement – the monk Wirathu, also called the 'Bip'Laden of Buddhism' – is internationally known for his hate speech against religious minorities, especially Muslims, and his promotion of Theravada Buddhism at the expense of religious minorities' rights.<sup>57</sup> Since 2012 the Rohingya people have been specifically targeted in horrific acts of community violence.<sup>58</sup> Thousands are believed to have been killed, while over 100,000 live internally displaced in camps. The violence has spread to central Burma, where the radical movement has attacked and killed Muslims who are not from the Rohingya people as well.<sup>59</sup> Local police and authorities are widely accused of not doing anything to help and of even joining in anti-Muslim attacks.<sup>60</sup>

The Buddhist nationalist movement is the driving force behind a recent set of draft laws concerning religion. The draft laws consist of four laws politicising different aspects of religion, such as restricting conversion,

<sup>55</sup> Pew Research Center, *Religious hostilities reach six-year high* (unpublished report: 2014), 62.

<sup>56</sup> Burma is a nation with a traditional belief in numerology. '969' represents the 'three jewels' of Buddhism, the attributes of Buddha, Buddha's teachings and the monastic order. This is a response to the Muslim number '786', which can be found on many Muslim houses and businesses. It refers to verses in the Qur'an that describes Allah as compassionate and merciful. This is, however, misinterpreted by the 969 movement as evidence that Muslims plan to conquer Burma in the 21st century: [www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/04/969-the-strange-numerological-basis-for-burmas-religious-violence/274816](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/04/969-the-strange-numerological-basis-for-burmas-religious-violence/274816)

<sup>57</sup> [www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/burma-needs-tolerance-to-reach-its-potential/2014/06/13/6e5d3c92-ea90-11e3-93d2-edd4be1f5d9e\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/burma-needs-tolerance-to-reach-its-potential/2014/06/13/6e5d3c92-ea90-11e3-93d2-edd4be1f5d9e_story.html) (accessed 30th November 2014); CSW, *Burma visit report* (unpublished report, 2013), 12-17.

<sup>58</sup> The Rohingya have faced discrimination for decades. In a military attack in 1978, around 200 000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh: [www.nytimes.com/2014/11/07/world/asia/rohingya-myanmar-rakhine-state-thailand-malaysia.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/07/world/asia/rohingya-myanmar-rakhine-state-thailand-malaysia.html?_r=0)

<sup>59</sup> CSW, *Burma visit report*, 12-17.

<sup>60</sup> [www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/related\\_material/burma\\_6.pdf](http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/related_material/burma_6.pdf) (accessed 30th November 2014).

restricting interfaith marriage and introducing limitations on childbirth for the Muslim population. Common to all the proposals is that they limit FoRB and create greater opportunity for discrimination and harassment of religious minorities. Several human rights organisations have protested against the draft laws. Former political prisoner Htet Myat claims that the draft laws remind him of the 1960s and the attempt to make Buddhism the state religion.<sup>61</sup>

If anti-Muslim sentiment in civic society is not dealt with, it is not unlikely that religious hatred will spread to other groups, such as Christians. Pamphlets containing anti-Christian messages, claiming that Christianity is a 'guest' religion, are in circulation. Anonymous activists have posted threats against Christians on social media.<sup>62</sup>

### **'We Pray this is Not a False Dawn'**

The FoRB situation in Burma is complex. On the one hand, the Burmese government seems to have eased some restrictions and attacks on Christians in large cities and ethnic areas with a ceasefire. On the other hand, conflict is still raging in Kachin state, where gross human rights violations are taking place. The ethnic women of Burma still suffer from sexual violence from soldiers of the regime. Recent years have also seen a new perpetrator entering the scene: the radical Buddhist nationalist movement. The disinformation that used to come from the state is now coming from within civic society. There is, however, widespread belief that some political elements are involved in the radical Buddhist nationalist movement. Even the former UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar, Tomás Ojea Quintana, has indicated that the authorities are complicit.<sup>63</sup> Many believe that officials opposed to the democratisation process were creating religious clashes in order to postpone the 2015 elections and the advancement of democracy.<sup>64</sup>

Where there are improvements in some areas, there are deteriorations in others. If Burma is to develop democratically, both state and society have to respect, protect and promote the rights of all ethnic, religious and belief groups.

Let me conclude with the words of the Catholic Archbishop of Yangon, Charles Bo: 'Burma stands on a knife edge of hope and fear... The ray of sunshine that the world has heralded is in danger of being replaced by

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.dvb.no/interview/race-protection-bill-creates-needless-restrictions-htet-myat-burma-myanmar/37935> (accessed 30th November 2014).

<sup>62</sup> [www.uscifr.gov/countries/burma](http://www.uscifr.gov/countries/burma), CSW, *Burma visit report*, 15.

<sup>63</sup> [www.dvb.no/news/reports-of-state-involvement-in-burma-unrest-un-expert/27315](http://www.dvb.no/news/reports-of-state-involvement-in-burma-unrest-un-expert/27315) (accessed 30th November 2014).

<sup>64</sup> CSW, *Burma visit report*, 12-15.

storm clouds. Concern fills our hearts as we see darkness compete with hope. We pray this is not a false dawn.’<sup>65</sup>

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

Copyrighted Material

---

<sup>65</sup> [www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/burma-needs-tolerance-to-reach-its-potential/2014/06/13/6e5d3c92-ea90-11e3-93d2-edd4be1f5d9e\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/burma-needs-tolerance-to-reach-its-potential/2014/06/13/6e5d3c92-ea90-11e3-93d2-edd4be1f5d9e_story.html)



# RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN INDONESIA, THE WORLD'S MOST POPULOUS MUSLIM STATE

Jeff Hammond

For many years international commentators have held up Indonesia as a prime example of moderate Islam, often stating that Islam has peacefully co-existed with religious minorities for centuries. On the other hand, many minority religious groups have complained of harassment, persecution, unbalanced court decisions and a minefield of laws which heavily discriminate against the religious freedom of minorities. What is the truth?

We will discuss these issues and look at a number of disturbing examples that raise serious questions concerning religious freedom in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim state.

At the beginning of 2015 Indonesia had a population of 255 million, of which at least 200 million are Muslims<sup>1</sup>. This is more than the total Muslim population of the Middle East.

## Constitutional Guarantees in Indonesia

Indonesia declared its independence on 17th August 1945. Under President Soekarno (1945-1966), Indonesia rejected proposals for it becoming an Islamic state and adopted the more open ideology of Pancasila, proclaiming that all Indonesians must believe in God. Under President Soeharto (1966-1998), Pancasila was strengthened as the state ideology and Indonesians could only believe in God in the context of one of five officially accepted religions – Islam, Catholicism, Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism. Under President Abdurahman Wahid (1999-2001), Confucianism was added to that list. However, minority populations adhering to Judaism, Sheikism, ancestor worship, animism and atheism have been denied any status or protection under the Indonesian legal system.<sup>2</sup>

Article 29 in Section XI of the 1945 Indonesian Constitution, in guaranteeing freedom of religion for all its citizens, states:

1. The state is based on the belief in the One and Only God.
2. The state guarantees each and every citizen freedom of religion and of worship in accordance with his religion and belief.

Furthermore, in 1999, Indonesia accepted the Prevention of Discrimination on the Basis of Race, Religion, or Belief, and the Protection

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/indonesia-population>

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pancasila\\_%28politics%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pancasila_%28politics%29)

of Minorities, as part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, guaranteeing its citizens even further freedoms. The following clauses are relevant to this chapter as they form part of the legal definitions of freedom of religion.

Article 2 states:

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Article 18 states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 20 states:

- (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.
- (2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

As a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Indonesia has agreed to numerous provisions guaranteeing freedom of religion, freedom of association and freedom of choice. In many ways, this freedom is greater, and certainly no less, than in some western countries such as Australia, the USA and the UK.

Having lived and worked in the religious field in Indonesia since 1974, I have felt a greater freedom and less legal intimidation than what I have experienced in the above-mentioned western countries. Does this mean that Indonesia has an unrestricted freedom of religion? Certainly not, as we shall see from the following examples.

### **Contradictions and Restrictions**

Despite having incredible freedom of religion in many aspects of daily life, there are intimidatory factors which impinge on the freedoms which have been guaranteed under the Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Copyrighted Material

#### *The Decrees of Cabinet Ministers Regulating the Building of Houses of Worship*

In a series of regulatory decrees, known as *SKB Dua Menteri* from 1969 through to the present time, there has been controversy concerning the ability of minorities, i.e. non-Muslims, to gain permits to build houses of worship. The difficulties are not reflected in the raw figures of the increase in the numbers of houses of worship for all faiths. A report from the Director General of Islamic Education at the Indonesian Ministry of

Religion<sup>3</sup> rejected the accusation of discrimination against minorities, reporting that, from 1977 to 2004, the number of mosques increased from 392,444 to 634,834. Christian (Protestant) churches increased from 18,909 to 43,909. Catholic churches increased from 4,934 to 12,473. Another report of the Ministry of Religion<sup>4</sup> stated that Buddhist houses of worship increased by 360% and Hindu temples by 400%.

These figures seem very impressive and can be used to support the view that there is freedom of religion. However, what these figures do not reveal are the numbers of requests to build houses of worship which were denied, not because they failed to fulfil the necessary provisions of the Ministerial Decrees, but due either to deliberate rejections by government officials that see Islamic Law as higher than the national laws and/or the intimidation of Islamic groups such as FPI, MMI, AGAP, etc. These decisions apply not only to new applicants but in some cases to long-standing houses of worship previously granted permits to be there.

A clear example has been the case of the Presbyterian (GKI) Church in Bogor, West Java. They had purchased land in 2001 and from 2002 to 2006 built relationships with the local community and gained 445 signatures approving the building of the church. A permit was granted by the Mayor of Bogor to build the church on 13th July 2006. In 2008, after building the church, their permit was revoked and the church was closed. The church took the matter to court and, in a series of court cases and appeals, the church won every case from the local court to the Supreme Court. In 2015, the church is still unable to use its church building as the government and its law enforcement bureaux refuse to enforce the law<sup>5</sup>.

Further evidence of tolerated violence against religious minorities can be seen with the attacks on 6th February 2011, of Sunni Muslims against the Islamic Ahmadiyah sect in Cikeusik, Pandeglang, West Java, with the destruction of their mosque, homes and shops, and the killing of three of their members. When twelve men were convicted of this crime, they were sentenced to between three and six months' imprisonment.<sup>6</sup> The Ahmadis were subsequently banned by order of the Governor of West Java, Ahmad Heryawan, on 3rd March 2011. He banned their activities and ordered them to correct their religious beliefs and join orthodox Islam.<sup>7</sup>

In Palu, Central Sulawesi, the GPPS Pentecostal Church in 1995 obtained permits to build a church for their congregation of 600-plus

<sup>3</sup> <http://pendis.kemenag.go.id/index.php?a=artikel&id2=imam001#.VMpc8MZj3X8>

<sup>4</sup> [www.balitbangdiklat.kemenag.go.id/indeks/berita/141-menag-skb-2-menteri-tak-perlu-direvisi.html](http://www.balitbangdiklat.kemenag.go.id/indeks/berita/141-menag-skb-2-menteri-tak-perlu-direvisi.html)

<sup>5</sup> <http://reformata.com/news/view/6182/pelecehan-hukum-walikota-bogor-terhadap-gki-yasmin>

<sup>6</sup> <https://docs.google.com/document/d/14ZG0RJzffB3y-6yVTreSCOGx0XOY03UHotsNImOlepo/edit>

<sup>7</sup> [www.ahmadheryawan.com/home/di-media-2/396-press-release-larangan-kegiatan-jemaat-ahmadiyah-di-jawa-barat](http://www.ahmadheryawan.com/home/di-media-2/396-press-release-larangan-kegiatan-jemaat-ahmadiyah-di-jawa-barat)

members. They fulfilled all the requirements under the existing regulations. On the day they were laying the foundation stones, Muslim demonstrators arrived threatening church members. The police advised the church not to proceed but to await a more conducive time. In 2010, the church again had had all their permits approved under the regulations and so again began to build the church.

As had happened fifteen years previously, Muslims from outside the neighbourhood arrived and again threatened church members. The police again ordered the church to desist from their efforts to build the church. As I was in the city, I met with the Head of the Department of Religion and informed him that this issue was about to become an international issue. He guaranteed that within twelve months the church would be built. Five years later, the church still has not been able to begin construction. This illustrates what is a common problem hindering freedom of religion for minority religious groups: even if permits are granted, the house of worship cannot be built because the police protect the attackers and do not enforce the law. So even if the law guarantees freedom of religion and freedom of assembly, it becomes meaningless when the state apparatus will not enforce the law and support those who act in accordance with it.

These examples show the impotence of the government in the face of targeted opposition by the majority religion against minority groups and, sadly, these examples are multiplied many times across the nation.

### *Discrimination in Court Decisions Favouring Islam over Minority Groups*

Indonesia's legal system is based on Dutch laws implemented in the colonial period, revised and added to during its seventy years of independence. The main problem is the obvious partiality of decisions handed down by the courts. Indonesia has had ongoing issues with corruption in its legal system, and in recent years many high officials in the justice system have been prosecuted. This is a corruption of justice by favouring Islamic religious interpretations over the law of the land. Through this mechanism, minority religious groups suffer a form of legal persecution.

Copyrighted Material

#### A. THREE WOMEN ACCUSED OF PROSELYTISING MUSLIM CHILDREN

On 9th September 2003, a Sunday School called 'Happy Sunday' was started in the village of Haurgeulis, Indramayu, West Java. Between 10-20 Christian children regularly attended. Then a grandmother of two young girls requested that her grandchildren attend 'Happy Sunday' and learn about God and right living. She was a former prostitute and her daughter, the girls' mother, was an active prostitute on the island of Batam, near Singapore. The grandmother didn't want the children to continue in the

family 'business'. The ladies running 'Happy Sunday', Dr Rebecca Laonita, Mrs Ratna Mala Bangun and Mrs Ety Pangesti, agreed to accept them and for nearly two years they regularly attended this Sunday School.

On 24th December 2004, the children had a Christmas party at which all children received gifts, as is the custom in many churches.

At Easter, on 26th March 2005, the children, their parents and/or grandparents (Christian and non-Christian) went on a picnic to the Indonesian theme park called 'Mini Indonesia Park'. To keep the children together, they were all given T-shirts with the writing 'Happy Sunday' for ease of identification.

The two Muslim children were brimming with happiness and when they went to school they were singing, 'Father Abraham has many sons, many sons has father Abraham', and the headmaster of the elementary school, an official of the Islamic Clerics Council (MUI), protested, calling the song *haram* (unclean). He reported to the Indramayu police that three Christian women were practising 'Christianisation' on these Muslim children. On 14th April 2005, 'Happy Sunday' was closed down.

On 16th May 2005 the three ladies were arrested and charged with violating Chapter 86 No.23/2002 concerning the Protection of Children which stated that: 'Every person who deliberately uses deception, a series of lies, or induces a child to choose a religion not according to his/her own will, although it is known or should be suspected to not yet being of an age of rational understanding, and is not yet of a responsible age according to the religion held, be sentenced with a maximum of five years' imprisonment and/or a maximum fine of one hundred million rupiah.'

Even though none of the children had changed their religion, the police produced one Bible and six blue T-shirts with 'Happy Sunday' on them as evidence.

On 25th May 2005, the former president of Indonesia, President KH Abdurrahman Wahid, wrote in defence of the ladies and requested that the charges be dropped as inappropriate and the ladies released. The Muslim Clerics Council (MUI) refused the request and took the ladies to trial.

I attended the trial, held weekly from June to September, and video-recorded it all, as well as scenes at the court before and during each session. Every session was attended by about 150 representatives from various Islamic organisations such as MUI, Laskar Izzul, BOM, AGAP, Forkom, Mujahidin, FUI, etc. Before each session, mass demonstrations using megaphones were held, whipping up the emotions of the crowd and calling upon them to kill the judges and the three women if they were acquitted. This was witnessed by the police who stood by and watched. The masses even took over the court, with the judges, the accused and the lawyers being forced to listen to the abuse and threats while the police watched.

During the trial there was not one witness who had seen, heard or attended the 'Happy Sunday' meetings. No-one could provide evidence of what the women were alleged to have taught. When the grandmother of the

children was called to give evidence, she failed to appear. No witnesses for the defence were called as no evidence against the women was presented. However, the women were found guilty and sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

Even though it was a religious case, the three women were tried by three Muslim judges. Normally, in a religious case there would be a judge from three different religions e.g. a Muslim, a Christian and a Hindu. In this case, this practice was not followed. Likewise, in the appeal to the Supreme Court, again the judges were all Muslims.

Such cases act as a form of intimidation against minority groups and, indeed, against the judges in the court. No evidence was produced, no witnesses had seen or heard any 'crime', yet the women were found guilty and sentenced.<sup>8</sup> The denial of natural justice is a form of legal persecution that denies freedom of religion to minority groups.<sup>9</sup>

#### B. COURT VERDICT IN THE POSO DISTRICT OF CENTRAL SULAWESI

On 15th November 2003, the Rev. Oranye Tadjodja, a Presbyterian pastor, and his nephew Yohanes Tadjodja were on their way to the village of Tangkura to conduct a village church service. At the time, this pastor was the treasurer of the Synod of the denomination. As they were passing through the village of Tabalu, they were attacked and beheaded. Their bodies were placed in the back of the car, and the car set on fire beside the Puna River.

Mr Sudirman, alias Aco, was the only one arrested for the crime. He was found guilty but sentenced to only thirteen months' imprisonment.<sup>10</sup>

#### C. COURT VERDICT IN THE MINANGKABAU DISTRICT OF WEST SUMATRA

An earlier case in West Sumatra further illustrates how the judiciary is used in restricting religious freedom. In 1998, in Minangkabau, a girl by the

Copyrighted Material

<sup>8</sup> A report and video can be seen at: [www.indonesiamatters.com/691/rebekka-zakaria-eti-pangesti-ratna-bangun](http://www.indonesiamatters.com/691/rebekka-zakaria-eti-pangesti-ratna-bangun)

<sup>9</sup> A further report can be found in the book entitled, *Proselytizing and the Limits of Religious Pluralism in Contemporary Asia* (University of Singapore, Asia Research Institute), 2014:

[https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=tJLFBAAQBAJ&pg=PA19&lpg=PA19&dq=Indramayu+Rebecca+Ety+Ratna&source=bl&ots=w\\_gGqcZRJQ&sig=JXqzit1mgEN2Uwv\\_dVyy4FjY\\_vU&hl=en&sa=X&ei=BsnPVKT1JcjrMbSgvgJ&ved=0CC8Q6AEwAjgK#v=onepage&q=Indramayu%20Rebecca%20Ety%20Ratna&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=tJLFBAAQBAJ&pg=PA19&lpg=PA19&dq=Indramayu+Rebecca+Ety+Ratna&source=bl&ots=w_gGqcZRJQ&sig=JXqzit1mgEN2Uwv_dVyy4FjY_vU&hl=en&sa=X&ei=BsnPVKT1JcjrMbSgvgJ&ved=0CC8Q6AEwAjgK#v=onepage&q=Indramayu%20Rebecca%20Ety%20Ratna&f=false)

<sup>10</sup> *Indonesian Top Secret: Membongkar Konflik Poso* (M. Tito Karnavian, Gramedia, Jakarta, 2008), 139-41.

name of Khairiaya Esniwah, alias 'Defi', became a Christian.<sup>11</sup> When her parents discovered her decision, they moved her into an Islamic boarding college to help restore her faith. She fled and sought refuge with the church. The Rev. Salmon Ongirwalu moved her to the house of an elder. On 12th June 1998, the two couples were arrested and accused of forced conversion, kidnapping and raping 'Defi'. In court, 'Defi' testified that she had become a Christian of her own free will, and that she had not been raped. A medical doctor gave evidence that she was, in fact, still a virgin. The court found them guilty. The two wives were sentenced to three years' imprisonment and their husbands to five years'. When they appealed, the sentences were increased to five years for the women and seven years for the men.

Sadly, these decisions of the judiciary, over a long period of time, are oppressive reminders of the restrictions on religious freedom and the threat that continues to exist to minority religious workers.

On the positive side, these decisions do not represent the total picture. Our experience has been that in most circumstances reason prevails, respect and tolerance exists, and religious freedoms are maintained. Nevertheless, the emergence of such cases from time to time creates an uneasy tension and even a form of oppression that creates an atmosphere of fear and the loss of religious freedom.

### *Weaknesses in the Government's Resolve in Dealing with Massacres and Unrest*

A disturbing trend in Indonesian life has been the conflict of political, economic and religious interests. These divisions in Indonesian society have occasionally been manifest in wide-scale corruption and the aligning of factions to gain economic, political or religious advantage by using conflict areas. It is the minorities that usually suffer in these conflicts and leave the government appearing weak and indecisive. The International Crisis Group reported that 'the conclusion is unavoidable that *Laskar Jihad*<sup>12</sup> received the backing of elements in the military and police. It was obviously military officers who provided them with military training, and neither the military nor the police made any serious effort to carry out the president's order preventing them from going to Maluku. And, once in Maluku, they often obtained standard military arms and on several occasions were openly backed by military personnel and indeed units'.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Religious Freedom Reporter*: <http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=news&id=97>; Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada: [www.ecoi.net/local\\_link/179828/282302\\_en.html](http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/179828/282302_en.html)

<sup>12</sup> *Laskar Jihad* (Indonesian: Warriors of Jihad), was an Islamist and anti-Christian Indonesian militia, which was founded and led by Jafar Umar Thalib. At present, the militia is believed to have disbanded.

<sup>13</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Indonesia: Violence and Radical Muslims', 10th October 2001. The Center for Defense Information recently concurred: 'The

This situation has occurred all too often, and when some of these interest groups work together, all others become helpless to respond.

#### A. THE POSO DISTRICT OF CENTRAL SULAWESI

After several rounds of violence and destruction beginning after Christmas 1998 and lasting till April 2000, the Governor of Central Sulawesi, Aminudin Polulele, met with Christian leaders and warned them not to engage in reprisals for the attacks against their community. He reminded them that they were the minority religious group and should accept their fate, and that it was Allah's will for them. This meeting is reported by David McRae, a researcher of the Poso conflict.<sup>14</sup>

Human Rights Watch reports that, in July 2001, *Laskar Jihad* arrived in Poso, welcomed by the Muslim Mayor Mr Muin Pusadan. Their arrival in Poso increased the strength and organisation of the Muslim fighters. Some human rights activists in Jakarta theorised that the army had allowed *Laskar Jihad* to enter the conflict to maintain a role for the military. Both the civilian and military authorities failed to protect the human rights of the residents of Poso by failing to prevent *Laskar Jihad*'s well-publicised arrival and their well-organised attacks.

*Laskar Jihad* described their strategy in Poso as a 'multi-dimensional approach... deploying not only ground troop volunteers but also those in the field of advocacy, health care, logistics, proselytising (*dakwah*), public relations and other areas that help support this noble movement'.<sup>15</sup>

*Laskar Jihad* set up guard posts in key spots, with no constraints from the police.

Their arrival coincided with a spike in violence in July 2001 and was followed later that year by a surge in attacks on villages.

During the build-up of the Islamic jihad in Poso, Human Rights Watch in their 2002 report<sup>16</sup> stated: 'While there is evidence of incitement, it is the underlying religious, political and economic tensions that best explain the violence.' In this period there were frequent incidents of combined interests working together – political, religious and economic – to gain advantage

---

support the militant group continues to receive from the highest levels of the Indonesian military ensures its survival. Sympathizers within TNI are believed to provide the group with cash, and possibly arms, and to order Moluccan officials not to crack down on *Laskar Jihad* members. According to Western intelligence sources, *Laskar Jihad* was actually founded with covert backing of military hardliners who wished to destabilize the post-Soeharto reformist government of Abdurrahman Wahid' (Center for Defense Information, 'In the Spotlight: Laskar Jihad', 8th March, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> A Few Poorly Organized Men: Interreligious Violence in Poso, Indonesia.

<sup>15</sup> Ayip Syafruddin, 'Mengapa Laskar Jihad ke Poso', *Mercusuar* (Palu), 7th-8th August 2001: [www.laskarjihad.or.id/artikel/keposo.htm](http://www.laskarjihad.or.id/artikel/keposo.htm)

<sup>16</sup> [www.hrw.org/reports/2002/indonesia/indonesia1102-03.htm](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/indonesia/indonesia1102-03.htm)



for the majority religion over the minority ones. These activities set a pattern of violence and intimidation that create fear among minority faiths and serve to restrict religious freedom. The minority religions – in this case, Christian, Buddhist and Hindu – were required to submit to Islamic interests and there would be further attacks against their communities.

In November 2001, a co-ordinated attack of Islamic militia, political leaders in the Poso District, and military units destroyed five Christian villages. These attacks occurred in the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan. The convoy of trucks, bulldozers and a kerosene tanker were used to transport the militia. During the attacks, the villagers fled into the jungle. All the houses were looted, the cattle rounded up and placed in trucks, then the houses, shops, churches and Hindu temples were sprayed with kerosene and set on fire.

The Human Rights Watch report referred to this, stating that ‘the razing of Christian villages in November 2001 was accompanied by well-organised convoys of trucks to loot the household objects and livestock before the villages were burnt to the ground’.

Although the major attacks in Poso have ceased, as recently as January 2015 three more Christian farmers were executed on their farms by the Islamic militia, causing further hardship.<sup>17</sup> The Presbyterian District Bishop, the Rev. Marson, texted me that the community was fearful of going to their farms as the military and police appeared to be doing nothing to prevent these attacks against the Christian community. Religious freedom has very close links with economic freedom, and this is being denied to the minority religious communities when the government, police and military fail to deal decisively with the threats that the minority communities face.

#### THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (GMIH) IN DUMA, GALELA, HALMAHERA

A further example of this denial of natural justice to minority communities can be seen in Halmahera, North Maluku. From January 2000 the Christian community sustained repeated attacks from the Islamic militias working in co-operation with East Javanese Brawijaya military units.

The attacks were fuelled by the speeches of the Islamic cleric, Abu Jibril Abdurrahman, a disciple of the jailed cleric, Abu Bakar Bashir.<sup>18</sup> His speech in the town of Galela just five kilometres from Duma was highly aggressive. He held a Qur’an in his left hand and a pistol in his right. He declared that Muslims use the Qur’an to deal with spiritual matters with Allah, but the pistol is to deal with the infidels. With the support of the

<sup>17</sup> Central Sulawesi, new wave of Islamist violence: murders, kidnappings, mutilations: [www.asianews.it/index.php?art=33245&l=en](http://www.asianews.it/index.php?art=33245&l=en)

<sup>18</sup> ‘Al Qaeda’s new frontier: Indonesia’, in *Christian Science Monitor* (Dan Murphy, 1st May 2002).

Brawijaya military unit, they attacked the Christian village of Duma, killing 211 in the Presbyterian church on 19th June 2000. A further 650 Christians perished on the boat, the *Cahaya Bahari*, fleeing the attacks. The attacks left 135 orphans in this one village alone.

John Pieris writes<sup>19</sup> that the Brawijaya Unit 512 headed by Letda Masyudi made no attempt to hinder some 3,000 jihad warriors coming from Soa Sio village.

Two years later, the Duma community returned to their village. The bodies of their loved ones were taken from their mass graves and given a burial in a martyrs' cemetery next to the ruins of the old church. To ensure peace, a military unit was stationed between the villages of Dokulamo and Duma. It was the same unit, Brawijaya 512, that participated in the massacre. Eye-witnesses reported that they warned the Christians to keep quiet, and mockingly raised their hands in the shape of a pistol and aimed it at them saying, 'Pow! Pow!'

This massacre has never been investigated. No-one has ever been charged. More people were killed than in the 2002 Bali bombing, but no-one seems interested in the justice and freedom of these people – freedom from fear and oppression and the impact it has on freedom of religion.

#### MANY OTHER EXAMPLES

Space does not allow for a full accounting of the above-mentioned incidents or of many others, such as:

1. The massacre of eighty people of the Wayoli tribe in February 2000 at a Lutheran church (GPM) on the island of Lata-lata, South Halmahera, the beheading of Pastor Pattiasina and four church elders, the forced conversion and mass circumcisions of the entire community, overseen by Indonesian military, police and government officials working in conjunction with jihad militias.
2. Massacres on the islands of Dama and Doi in January 2000, off North Halmahera, and forced conversions, marriages and rapings.
3. Attacks against Christians in Central Sulawesi where the Tentena and Palu markets were bombed, killing over thirty, the beheadings of three schoolgirls, and the assassination of the Rev. Kangkoli at Palu market.

These, and many other incidents, indicate that religious freedom can be curtailed at any time by political leaders, military, police and majority religious groups, and remains an ongoing factor in understanding religious freedom in Indonesia.

---

<sup>19</sup> Tragedi Maluku: sebuah krisis peradaban: analisis kritis aspek politik, Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2004, John Pieris, 261.

### **Greater Freedoms than Many Expect**

Many of the above cases can leave the impression that Indonesia is a very oppressive society where religious freedom is trampled on and ignored. This, however, is not the case, and I would like to conclude by giving some examples of the religious freedoms that do exist within Indonesia.

#### **A. JOINT CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM PROJECTS**

We conducted a joint project between an Islamic organisation, FORKUM (Forum Komunikasi Ulama dan Masyarakat), headed by Gus Sholeh, an Indonesian cleric and scholar, and a Christian foundation, YBI (Yayasan Berkati Indonesia).

After the devastation that had occurred in three provinces of Central Sulawesi, Maluku and North Maluku, there was a lot of hatred and bitterness and a cry for revenge. There was a desperate need for reconciliation and for the rebuilding of bridges of communication between the different communities.

In 2006 the European Union granted YBI a project to conduct a peace and reconciliation project in the conflict districts of Poso, Central Sulawesi, and Tobelo, Halmahera, North Maluku.

During 2007 Gus Sholeh and I conducted monthly seminars and consultations, bringing together Muslim, Christian and Hindu community leaders. Both Gus Sholeh and I were totally free to discuss our faiths, differences and similarities. In such an exercise, we had total freedom. Militants attended, as well as people of strict and opposite ideological standpoints from all faiths; however, we had total freedom of expression.

Henrik Rasmussen, the General Secretary of the Danish Europe Mission, attended a series of five seminars in the Poso District, and wrote a report dated 29th October 2007. The seminars were very successful, and leaders of Muslim villages which had radical militants were so moved by what they had heard and seen that they requested that this team also come and speak with their communities. Rasmussen wrote: 'Some Muslim community leaders were worried about extremist tendencies still lingering among the people, and therefore invited the speakers to come out to their villages as well, in order to convince the inhabitants that violence is not an acceptable way to deal with conflict.' This is an expression of the religious freedom that exists within Indonesia.

#### **B. SOCIAL WORK IN MUSLIM COMMUNITIES**

On 26th December, 2004, a devastating tsunami hit SE Asia and especially Aceh in Indonesia. Some 230,000 people perished. My wife and I became heavily involved in working with Muslim communities in the Deah Baru village of Banda Aceh. There were no restrictions on our religious freedom. On Sundays, we organised an English-language church service at the local

Methodist church which was attended by around sixty foreign aid workers from various countries and organisations.

For the rest of the week we were all involved in many field projects. We helped to build the Deah Baru Maternity Hospital, and although Aceh is a province with *shari'a* law, I was asked to officially dedicate the hospital. This is what was recorded in the national newspaper, *Bisnis Indonesia*:<sup>20</sup> 'From the beginning of the disaster and into the unforeseeable future, volunteers from within the country and from overseas have been faithful and patient in befriending the people of Aceh through the difficult post-tsunami period. One of these many faithful foreigners is Jeff Hammond... co-pastor of a church in Jakarta.' The Director of Health for Aceh and Head of the Permata Hati Hospital stated: 'I am very grateful that Allah brought me to Jeff. He is a humanitarian activist who has sincerely helped his fellow men, not caring what tribal background they come from or the colour of their skin or their religion.'

Even as a Christian minister, I had a great freedom even within Aceh. Of course, there must be the exercise of common courtesies, tolerance and patience, but much of this is just good manners. When we treat people with respect, they will respect us and from that respect will come great freedom.

In forty years of ministry in Indonesia, I have never felt personally impeded in my work. Yes, at times I have been questioned and asked to explain why certain activities were undertaken. At times I have been asked to postpone certain activities, but never have I felt that my freedom to express my religious beliefs have been taken from me.

This does not mean that there have not been many others who have felt that their religious freedoms have been confiscated. Indeed, they have. Churches have been closed, or their construction impeded. Some evangelistic campaigns have been closed down or banned. People have been threatened and imprisoned, denying them the right to a full and free expression of faith.

This is what makes Indonesia so interesting. It is not a simple situation. It is indeed very complex, but the end-result is that over the seventy years since Indonesia claimed its independence, the church has grown significantly and some 20 million Muslims have become Christians.<sup>21</sup> In Indonesia they have had the freedom to choose their own faith and to practise it, and ultimately that is why it can be declared that there is freedom of religion in Indonesia.

---

<sup>20</sup> 'Setia menemani korban tsunami Aceh', in *Bisnis Indonesia*, 29th June 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Stated by President Abdurrahman Wahid in a private dinner with Dr Jeff Hammond and the Rev Natan Setiabudi, Chairman of the Indonesian Fellowship of Churches (PGI), 2005.

# FAITH AND FREEDOM IN THE LAND OF THE PURE

Maqsood Kamil

*Mullah ko jo hai Hind mein sajde ki ijāzat, nādān yeh samajhtā hai kih Islam hai āzād*<sup>1</sup> (while mullah [Muslim religious leader] has permission to prostrate in prayer, foolish, he thinks Islam is free). It is interesting, that Pakistan ('Land of the pure') came into being in 1947 as the only modern state created on the ideology of religious freedom. The above verse from the poem *Hindi Islam* by Dr Muhammad Iqbal, considered to be the creator of the ideology of Pakistan, expresses the difference between a permission to say ritual prayers and a freedom to express and propagate one's beliefs or religion. Evidently, the desire to practise Islam with full freedom played a crucial role in the creation of a new country for the Muslims of India. The condition of religious minorities in Pakistan is admittedly far worse than it was for the Muslims of India at the time of partition. Christians, Hindus, Parsees, Baha'is, Sikhs, Ahmadis and even Shi'a Muslims, in the words of Iqbal, may have permission to worship but do they have freedom to profess and propagate their faith? I will explore this question below. Although other minorities are included here; the focus of this discussion will be on the Christian minority.

At the time of her creation, Pakistan's population consisted of 60% Muslims and 40% other religious minorities; but within 66 years minorities have been reduced from 40% to less than 4%.<sup>2</sup> On the promise of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the father of the nation, for the equality of all citizens before the law and for freedom of religion,<sup>3</sup> Christian politicians played a crucial role for the state of Punjab to decide in favour of joining the anticipated country of Pakistan.<sup>4</sup> The 1956 Constitution of Pakistan was secular and guaranteed the freedom of profession and propagation of faith

---

<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *Zarb-e-Kalim* (Lahore: Al-Faisal, 1998), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ucanews.com Reporter, 25th June 2012. *Pakistan's Minority Population is shrinking*:

[www.ucanews.com/news/pakistans-minority-population-is-shrinking/53801](http://www.ucanews.com/news/pakistans-minority-population-is-shrinking/53801)

<sup>3</sup> Ammar Shahbazi, 'Was Jinnah's Promise to the Minorities honoured?' in *The News*, 25th December 2012: [www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-4-150305-Was-Jinnah%C3%A2%C2%80%C2%99s-promise-to-the-minorities-honoured](http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-4-150305-Was-Jinnah%C3%A2%C2%80%C2%99s-promise-to-the-minorities-honoured) (accessed 26th June 2014); Khaled Ahmed, *The Fractured Image of Muhammad Ali Jinnah* (1999):

<http://old.himalmag.com/himal-feed/53/2413-the-fractured-image-of-muhammad-ali-jinnah.html> (accessed 26th June 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Munir-ul-Anjum, 'The Role of Christians in the Freedom Movement of Pakistan: An Appraisal', in *Pakistan Journal of Social Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2012), 437-43.

to all the citizens of Pakistan.<sup>5</sup> Pakistan was originally called the Democratic Republic of Pakistan.

However, the amendments in the Constitution in 1962 determined that Islam should be the religion of the state and Pakistan should be called the 'Islamic Republic of Pakistan'.<sup>6</sup> The 1973 Constitution was overtly Islamic and determined the scope and freedom of the Legislative Assembly. It requires the Islamisation of existing laws deemed antithetical to Islam, and legislation could be done only in accordance with the Qur'an and the Sunnah. No legislation could be passed which might be deemed repugnant to Islam. This Constitution also barred non-Muslims from becoming head of the state or government.<sup>7</sup> It has been correctly observed: 'Although the Constitution includes adequate accommodation for Pakistan's religious minorities, in practice, non-Sunni Muslims face religious discrimination in both public and private spheres'.<sup>8</sup>

General Zia ul-Haq came to power via a coup in 1977. 'Zia ul-Haq focussed his energies to create a purer Islamic state...'<sup>9</sup> His policies of Islamisation made the military and Muslim religio-political parties like Jamā't-e-Islāmī and the conservative Deobandi Sunnis, work hand-in-glove.<sup>10</sup> Zia introduced and implemented Islamic laws, Islamised the curriculum, which distorted the history and demonised the religious minorities.<sup>11</sup> Zia introduced what is known as the 'Separate Electorate'<sup>12</sup> for the religious minorities, which separated them from mainstream political life. The implementation of certain Islamic laws, especially the Pakistan Penal Code's clauses 295 A, B, and C, have been constantly used against the religious minorities, to subdue them socially, politically, economically and religiously. Khaled Ahmed writes:

Apart from separate electorates, there are other laws that make non-Muslims in Pakistan second-class citizens. The law of evidence in force under the *shari'a* discriminates against them because their testimony is not equal to that of Muslims; the *Gustakh-e-Rasul* (Insult to the Prophet) law targets non-Muslims and has serious legal defects; conversion to Islam by non-Muslim women has been exploited by Muslims because Christian and Hindu marriages stand automatically annulled after the wife converts to Islam.

<sup>5</sup> Berkley Centre for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, in *Religious Freedom in Pakistan*: <http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/religious-freedom-in-pakistan> (accessed 16th June 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Stephen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, 58.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, 58.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, 58.

<sup>9</sup> Hussain Haqqani, *Pakistan: Between Masque and Military* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), 136-7.

<sup>10</sup> Haqqani, *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military*, 136-37.

<sup>11</sup> Haqqani, *Pakistan: Between Masque and Military*, 159.

<sup>12</sup> Khaled Ahmed, *The Fractured Image of Muhammad Ali Jinnah* (1999): <http://old.himalmag.com/himal-feed/53/2413-the-fractured-image-of-muhammad-ali-jinnah.html> (accessed 26th June 2014).

Under another law, non-Muslims are not allowed to compete freely with Muslims for seats in educational institutions and for government employment; under the *zakat* (Poor Due) law, non-Muslims are not allowed treatment in institutions run by Islamic charity.<sup>13</sup>

These laws pose one of the most serious threats, not only to the freedom to express and propagate their faith but also to the very existence of the religious minorities. Pakistan has been declared as ‘One of the most hostile nations for religious minorities’.<sup>14</sup> Pakistan is placed ‘among the top five overall for restrictions on religion, singling out its anti-blasphemy statutes’.<sup>15</sup> It has been observed that,

there has been an increase in the number of blasphemy accusations since Zia-ul-Haq’s legal changes took effect, which has caused growing turbulence and instability in Pakistan over the last thirty years. Muslims and non-Muslims alike live in fear of blasphemy accusations because of the violence that often follows, while religious minorities are additionally subject to extreme discrimination and persecution.<sup>16</sup>

The first serious attack on the freedom of religion, in relation to the minorities, was launched through the amendment of the 1973 Constitution. Zia’s amendments even amended the Objectives Resolution and silently took away the word ‘freely’, central to the clause guarding freedom of religion for minorities. Before the amendment, it read that minorities would be able ‘freely to profess and practise their religion’. Realising the seriousness of this amendment, Christians protested but their voice was smothered. The amendment was then challenged in the Supreme Court of Pakistan. The Supreme Court’s decision was a judicial blow that killed the hope of minorities to enjoy freedom of faith in Pakistan. Sookhdeo states: ‘A landmark decision in the Supreme Court in 1993 ruled that the fundamental rights guaranteed in the Constitution were limited by whether they conformed to the injunctions of Islam as contained in the Qur’an and the Sunnah.’<sup>17</sup> Bilal Hayee argues: ‘The right to religious freedom was thus central to the struggle for Pakistan.’ He refers to the much-quoted speech of Quaid-e-Azam, delivered before the Constituent Assembly on 11th August 1947: ‘You are free to go to your temples; you are free to go to your mosques, or any other place of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may

Copyrighted Material

<sup>13</sup> Ahmed, *The Fractured Image of Muhammad Ali Jinnah*.

<sup>14</sup> Jaweed Kaleem, ‘Religious Minorities in Islamic Pakistan Struggle but Survive amid increasing Persecution’, in *HUFF Post, Religion*, 20th June 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Kaleem, *Religious Minorities in Islamic Pakistan*

<sup>16</sup> Berkley Centre for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, *Pakistan: Berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/religious-freedom-in-pakistan* (2014) (accessed 20th June 2014).

<sup>17</sup> Patrick Sookhdeo, *A People Betrayed* (Fearn: Christian Focus and Isaac, 2002), 102.

belong to any religion or caste or creed – that has nothing to do with the business of the state'.<sup>18</sup>

Pakistan's first foreign minister, Sir Zafarullah Khan, as a representative of Pakistan and as a Muslim, made an important contribution during the discussion on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly. In his speech he said: 'Muslim religion was a missionary religion; it strove to persuade men to change their faith and alter their way of living, so as to follow the faith and the way of living it preached, but it recognised the same right of conversion for other religions as for itself.'<sup>19</sup> Terry talks about Pakistan's full support of human rights. He quotes Zafarullah's speech to the UN General Assembly: 'Khan told the delegates that the Article of religious freedom would have the full support of Pakistan, then the UN member with the largest Muslim population.' The issue, he said, 'involved the honour of Islam'. He cited a passage from the Qur'an for the position that faith could not have an obligatory character: 'Let him who chooses to believe, believe, and him who chooses to disbelieve, disbelieve.'<sup>20</sup> In that speech, Zafarullah even recognised that Islam allows conversion out of Islam. He said, 'Islam was a proselytising religion that strove to persuade others to change their faith and to alter their way of living. It recognises the same right of conversion for other religions, though it had objection to Christian missionary work when that assumed a political character. The freedom to change beliefs, he concluded, was consistent with the Islamic religion.'<sup>21</sup>

As freedom of religion essentially embodies the freedom to change one's religion, the founding fathers and early leaders of Pakistan seem to have truly understood the meaning of religious freedom and were willing to grant it to the citizens of Pakistan, a freedom that none of the four classical schools of Islamic law grants to Muslims. Sookhdeo has shown that 'the death penalty for apostasy is clearly specified in all four main schools of [Islamic] law'.<sup>22</sup> *Ridda* or *irtidād* (apostasy) is considered a capital crime by the overwhelming majority of Muslims. However, leaders like Jinnah and Zafarullah were more open and sensitive to provide for the freedom of faith to religious minorities. Both leaders belonged to minority Muslim sects: Jinnah was a Shi'a while Zafarullah was an Ahmadi Muslim. Both Shi'ites and Ahmadis are under persecution in Pakistan.

It is clear that Pakistan, whose very foundation was laid on the philosophy of religious freedom for the Muslim minority and whose

<sup>18</sup> Bilal Hayee, *Blasphemy Laws and Pakistan's Human Rights Obligations*: [www.austlii.edu.au/journals/UNDAULawRw/2012/3.pdf](http://www.austlii.edu.au/journals/UNDAULawRw/2012/3.pdf) (2012), 26.

<sup>19</sup> Paul M. Taylor, *Freedom of Religion – UN and European Human Rights and Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 59.

<sup>20</sup> Terry Tom, *Faith and Freedom* (Xulon Press, 2005), 18.

<sup>21</sup> Sharma Arvind, *Problematizing Religious Freedom* (New York: Springer, 2011), 213.

<sup>22</sup> Sookhdeo, *A People Betrayed*, 279.



founder expressly declared the intention of ensuring freedom of faith for all Pakistanis, lost its way right after the death of Jinnah. The adoption of the Objectives Resolution by the Constituent Assembly in 1949 provided the solid basis for the Islamisation of Pakistan and severely restricted freedom of faith for non-Muslims by resolving that 'the future Constitution of Pakistan should be based on the Islamic principles of freedom, social justice and equity'.<sup>23</sup> Zia tried to legitimise his coup by his promise to turn Pakistan into a purer Islamic state as envisioned in the Objectives Resolution. He implemented a number of Islamic *shari'a* laws, set up Federal *shari'a* Courts, parallel to the Supreme Court, introduced Islamic banking, restricted headship of governmental institutions for practising and confessing Muslims, replaced Sunday with Friday as a holiday which made it difficult for Christians to attend church on Sunday, and more than anything else, he implemented anti-blasphemy laws which contradict all the established and ratified covenants and conventions of international human rights of which Pakistan itself is a signatory. Zia's policy of Islamisation and his unrestricted use of religion for his own political agenda, and his open alliance with Jamat-e-Islami contributed towards the victimisation of minorities. Anti-blasphemy laws have been constantly used by the members of the majority as well as by the state for victimising and restricting the freedom of faith of non-Muslims.

Since the introduction of the anti-blasphemy and other Islamic laws, freedom to express and propagate one's faith has been severely limited. Not only do minorities not have freedom of faith in the true sense of the word; they have been actively persecuted for their faith and wherever possible forced to convert to Islam. On 6th February 1997, a mob of 30-35,000, led by extremist and militant Muslims, attacked a Christian village called Shanti Nagar<sup>24</sup> ('village of peace') and looted it, reducing it to ashes. In October 2001, Muslim extremists armed with AK-47 assault rifles attacked Christian worshippers at St Dominic Church, Bahawalpur. Sixteen Christians and a policeman were killed and hundreds more were injured. In March 2002, the Protestant International Church in Islamabad was attacked with grenades. Five people died and nearly fifty were injured.<sup>25</sup> I had preached the previous Sunday in that very church. In August 2002, a church in the Christian Hospital at Taxila was attacked with grenades; three

Copyrighted Material

<sup>23</sup> Sookhdeo, *A People Betrayed*, 28.

<sup>24</sup> Naseem George and Aftab Alexander, 1997: 'Pakistan: Mob attacks on Shanti Nagar', in *Human Rights Solidarity*: [www.hrsolidarity.net/mainfile.php/1997vol07no01/237](http://www.hrsolidarity.net/mainfile.php/1997vol07no01/237) (accessed 11th September 2014).

<sup>25</sup> 'LaTonya Taylor, 2002: Bloody Sunday', in *Christianity Today*: [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/marchweb-only/3-25-33.0.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/marchweb-only/3-25-33.0.html) (accessed 11th September 2014).

nurses died and 23 others were injured.<sup>26</sup> In the same month, Murree Christian School came under fire from extremists and six Christians were killed.<sup>27</sup>

False accusations of desecrating the Qur'an or insulting the Prophet of Islam against persons belonging to the minorities, especially against Christians, have had a devastating impact on freedom of faith in Pakistan. In 2005, a Christian named Yusuf Masih exchanged some hot words with a Muslim *Kalu*, who threatened him with dire consequences. He later accused Yusuf of desecrating the Qur'an. Nearly 1,500 extremist Muslims attacked Christians and burnt three churches, a school and dozens of houses.<sup>28</sup> In 2009, nearly 100 Christian houses were looted and then torched in the village Bahmani Wala, district Kasur; the same thing happened in Korian, a village near Gojra. But the most devastating attack was carried out on the Christian colony of Gojra where sixty homes were torched and eight Christians were burnt alive.<sup>29</sup> In March 2013, more than 100 Christian houses and a number of churches were reduced to ashes in Joseph Colony, Lahore. However, the most horrific attack was carried out by two suicide bombers on 23rd September 2013 at All Saints' Church, Peshawar. Ninety-eight persons, including women and children, died and hundreds of others were seriously injured. Christians in Peshawar had been receiving threats from extremist and terrorist Muslims to convert to Islam or face the consequences. At the time of writing, the most recent act of horrific violence against Christians that has shocked the world took place on 5th November 2014. A poor Christian couple, Shahbaz Masih and his pregnant wife, were brutally killed by a mob and then thrown into a brick kiln and reduced to ashes on the false accusation of desecrating the Qur'an.<sup>30</sup>

Many Christians have been falsely accused of blasphemy, arrested, imprisoned or killed. Sawan Masih, accused of committing blasphemy, which became a pretext for arson and the looting of Joseph Colony, was

<sup>26</sup> 'Nurses Killed in an Attack on Christian Hospital', in *The Telegraph*, 9th August 2002: [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1403992/Nurses-killed-in-attack-on-Christian-hospital.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1403992/Nurses-killed-in-attack-on-Christian-hospital.html) (accessed 11th September 2014).

<sup>27</sup> David Rhode, 6th August 2002: *Gunman Kills 6 in a Christian School in Pakistan* (New York: *Time* archives): [www.nytimes.com/2002/08/06/world/gunmen-kill-6-at-a-christian-school-in-pakistan.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2002/08/06/world/gunmen-kill-6-at-a-christian-school-in-pakistan.html) (accessed 11th September 2014).

<sup>28</sup> Declan Walsh, 'Attacks leave churches gutted and religious minorities living in fear', in *The Guardian*, 28th November 2005: [www.theguardian.com/world/2005/nov/28/pakistan.declanwalsh](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/nov/28/pakistan.declanwalsh) (accessed 11th September 2014).

<sup>29</sup> Asad, Kharal, 'Looking back: Not a single person convicted for Gojra riots', in *The Express Tribune*, 10th March 2013: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/518585/looking-back-not-a-single-person-convicted-for-gojra-riots> (accessed 11th September 2014).

<sup>30</sup> Jillani Shahzeb, 'Pakistan Christian Community living in fear after mob killing', in *BBC News*, 8th November 2014: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-29956115](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-29956115) (accessed 8th December 2014).

given the death sentence. Sawan pleaded for his innocence throughout his year-long trial.<sup>31</sup> In May 1998, Bishop John Joseph committed suicide in front of the court in Sahiwal that had passed a death sentence for young Ayub Masih, falsely accused of blasphemy.<sup>32</sup> Earlier, in 1993, Rahmat Masih, Manzoor Masih and Salamat Masih (only 14 years old) were accused of blasphemy. They were attacked after a court hearing. Manzoor was killed while the others were injured. The lower court handed down the death sentence to both Rahmat and Salamat. But the High Court bench, headed by Justice Arif Iqbal Bhatti and Chaudhary Khurshid Ahmad, acquitted the accused since they were illiterate and did not know how to write Arabic. Following the decision, religious parties, led by the Milli Yakjihti Council (Council for National Unity of Purpose) called for a nationwide strike against the acquittal of the accused. Justice Arif Iqbal was later murdered in his chamber. The assassin confessed, 'He killed the judge because he was on the bench that had acquitted two Christian men, Salamat and Rehmat Masih in a blasphemy case.'<sup>33</sup> In July 2010, two brothers, Pastor Rashid Emmanuel and Sajid Emmanuel, were also shot dead as they were being brought by the police to appear before the judge.<sup>34</sup> Frank Crimi sums up the Muslim mobs' blood-thirst for the blood of those accused of blasphemy: 'Perhaps part of Pakistan's enchantment with its blasphemy laws stems from the fact that many Pakistani Muslims believe killing a blasphemous person earns a heavenly reward, a holy perk – which may help explain why at least thirty Christians accused of blasphemy since 2009 have been killed by mobs of Islamist vigilantes.'<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Sawan Masih, 'Pakistani Christian gets death penalty for blasphemy', in *BBC News*, 28th March 2014: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-26781731](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-26781731) (accessed 11th September 2014).

<sup>32</sup> Owen Bennett-Jones (BBC News, *Despatches*, 7th May 1998): [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/88890.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/88890.stm) (accessed 11th September 2014).

<sup>33</sup> 'High-profile blasphemy cases in the last 63 years', in *Dawn*, 8th December, 2010: [www.dawn.com/news/589587/high-profile-blasphemy-cases-in-the-last-63-years](http://www.dawn.com/news/589587/high-profile-blasphemy-cases-in-the-last-63-years) (accessed 12th September 2014).

<sup>34</sup> 'Pakistan City tense after "blaspheming" Christians shot dead', in *BBC News South Asia*, 20th July 2010: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-10696762](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-10696762) (accessed 12th September 14); Fareed Khan, 'On trial for blasphemy, two Christian brothers murdered in Pakistan', in *Asia News*, 19th July 2010: [www.asianews.it/news-en/On-trial-for-blasphemy,-two-Christian-brothers-murdered-in-Faisalabad-18977.html](http://www.asianews.it/news-en/On-trial-for-blasphemy,-two-Christian-brothers-murdered-in-Faisalabad-18977.html) (accessed 12th September 2014).

<sup>35</sup> Frank Crimi, 'To Jail A Down's Syndrome Girl', in *Front Page Magazine*, 23rd August, 2012: [www.frontpagemag.com/2012/frank-crimi/to-jail-a-downs-syndrome-girl](http://www.frontpagemag.com/2012/frank-crimi/to-jail-a-downs-syndrome-girl) (accessed 14th September 2014).

A Christian couple, Shafqat Emmanuel and Shagufta Kausar, have recently been sentenced to death for allegedly committing blasphemy.<sup>36</sup> As regards Asia Bibi, mother of five who has been jailed since 2009 and condemned to death, her appeal against her punishment has been postponed five times consecutively.<sup>37</sup> Another startling case which caught the attention of the Pakistani nation as well as that of the international community was the accusation of blasphemy against fourteen-year-old Rimsha Masih who was suffering from Down's Syndrome. Some Muslim clerics have even declared that Bible to be a blasphemous book; as immoral acts of certain prophets are recorded in it which, they assert, are deeply offensive to Muslims. They have demanded that the Supreme Court of Pakistan should ban the Bible in Pakistan. Anuragh Kumar noted: 'A leader of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (or JUI-S) party (Samiul Haq) on Tuesday demanded that the Supreme Court of Pakistan ban the Bible, saying "blasphemous" portions had been "added to it", Pakistan's newspaper, *News International*, reported.'<sup>38</sup> This attempt to ask the apex court to ban the Bible in Pakistan could have extremely serious consequences for the freedom of faith in Pakistan. It is well recognised internationally that the situation of minorities in Pakistan is very serious. Jaweed Kaleen describes the struggle of minorities for survival. He quotes: 'A Pew Research Center report named Pakistan, which is 96% Muslim, one of the most hostile nations for religious minorities. Pew placed the country among the top five overall for restrictions on religion, singling out its anti-blasphemy statutes.'<sup>39</sup> Keeping the serious condition of minorities in Pakistan in mind, a US panel urged the US government to add Pakistan to a black list of violators of religious freedom. In its annual report this commission said Pakistan 'represents the worst situation in the world of religious freedom, among the countries that are not already on the US black list, and that the

---

<sup>36</sup> 'Pakistani couple get death sentences for blasphemy', in *BBC News South Asia*, 5th April 2014: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-26901433](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-26901433) (accessed 12th September 2014).

<sup>37</sup> 'Asia Bibi Appeal postponed for a fifth time', in *Christian Today*, 27th May 2014: [www.christiantoday.com/article/asia.bibi.appeal.postponed.for.a.fifth.time/37701.htm](http://www.christiantoday.com/article/asia.bibi.appeal.postponed.for.a.fifth.time/37701.htm) (accessed 12th September 2014).

<sup>38</sup> Anuragh Kumar, 'Now Bible faces blasphemy charges in Pakistan', in *Christian Post*, 3rd June 2011: [www.christianpost.com/news/now-bible-faces-blasphemy-charges-in-pakistan-50789](http://www.christianpost.com/news/now-bible-faces-blasphemy-charges-in-pakistan-50789) (accessed 14th September 2014); Atika Rahman, 'JUI-S urges SC to ban Bible within 30 days', in *Express Tribune*, 9th June 2011: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/185452/jui-s-urges-sc-to-ban-bible-threatens-consequences> (accessed 14th September 2014).

<sup>39</sup> Jaweed Kaleem, 'Religious Minorities in Pakistan struggle but survive amid increasing persecution', in *HUFF POST*, Religion, 20th June 2014: [www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/10/religious-minorities-pakistan\\_n\\_4734016.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/10/religious-minorities-pakistan_n_4734016.html) (accessed 20th June 2014).

conditions in the past year hit an all-time low'.<sup>40</sup> Mark Kellner also noted: 'Pakistan is a world leader in oppressing religious minorities, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom declared in a report on Wednesday.'<sup>41</sup>

Freedom of faith, especially minority faiths, is restricted at constitutional, governmental and popular levels. Constitutionally, 'Religious freedom is subject to law, public order and morality; accordingly, actions or speech deemed derogatory to Islam or its prophet, for example, are not protected'. At a governmental level, 'The government fails in many respects to protect the rights of minorities. This is due both to public policy and to the government's unwillingness to take action against societal forces hostile to those that practise a different faith... Specific government policies that discriminate against religious minorities include: the use of "Hudood" ordinances, which apply different standards of evidence to Muslims and non-Muslims, and to men and women for the alleged violation of Islamic laws'.<sup>42</sup> At a popular level, a general understanding prevails among Muslims that Pakistan is for them, and that minority faith groups do not have freedom to profess and propagate their faith. Pakistan and Islam are considered synonymous. Therefore, if religious minorities want to live in Pakistan, they should convert to Islam. Lipton observes, 'Parties and groups with religious affiliations target minority groups'.<sup>43</sup> Public outrages against minorities, briefly mentioned earlier, have been unprecedented. Lashker-e-Jhangvi, a banned extremist and militant organisation, was reportedly responsible for the destruction of churches, schools and Christian homes in Sangla Hill and the Christian colony of Gojra. In all these destructive incidents, governments have shunned punishing the perpetrators of violence against minorities. Lipton writes, 'The government failed to intervene in cases of societal violence directed at minority religious groups. The lack of an adequate government response contributed to an atmosphere of impunity for acts of violence and intimidation committed against minorities'.<sup>44</sup> Faced with this appalling situation, Christians, Hindus and Ahmadis are migrating from Pakistan. Theodore Gabriel observes: 'Sporadic violent incidents against churches and Christians, the Blasphemy Law and even the Islamisation of Pakistan,

Copyrighted Material

<sup>40</sup> AFP, *US Panel Urges Action on Pakistan religious freedom*: dawn.com (AFP, 30th April 2014), [www.dawn.com/news/1103293](http://www.dawn.com/news/1103293) (accessed 15th September 2014).

<sup>41</sup> Mark A. Kellner, 'Pakistan tops new list of religious freedom abusers, panel says', in *Desert News*, 1st May 2014:

<http://national.deseretnews.com/article/1395/pakistan-tops-new-list-of-religious-freedom-abusers-pane-1-says.html> (accessed 15th September 2014).

<sup>42</sup> Edward P. Lipton (ed), *Religious freedom in Asia* (New York: Hauppauge, 2002), 39.

<sup>43</sup> Lipton, *Religious freedom in Asia*, 39.

<sup>44</sup> Lipton, *Religious freedom in Asia*, 39.

have filled Christians with a sense of foreboding and despondency. It is even so in the case of such a socially and economically struggling community as that of the Christians. They tend to see Islam as a steamroller force, and to panic. This might give rise to a ghetto mentality.' Justice Cornelius, writing in *Christian Voice* in 1953, warns against 'a general feeling of despair, a widespread lack of confidence, and a common readiness to anticipate the worst'.<sup>45</sup>

Theodore was writing in 2007; major incidents of violence against Christians and a marked escalation in blasphemy cases have taken place since then. National newspapers have widely reported the mass migration of Pakistani Christians who are seeking asylum in Thailand, Sri Lanka and Malaysia, waiting for their turn in UN camps.<sup>46</sup> Not only Christians but also other minorities, including Ahmadis, Hindus, Sikhs and Hazara Shi'as, are also leaving Pakistan.<sup>47</sup> Nazir Bhatti, who has long been advocating for Christians through his paper *Pakistan Christian Post*, in a letter to the UN Secretary General, claims that 90% Pakistani Christians favour refugee status from the UN after violence.<sup>48</sup> This claim might seem a bit of an exaggeration. However, it is true that Christians neither feel safe nor have equal rights as citizens of Pakistan. An overwhelming majority of Christians is living in a state of fear, insecurity and mistrust. Social, political, constitutional and religious hostility, coupled with extreme socio-economic and political weakness, seems to have turned Christians into a ghetto community. Nearly half a century of growing persecution and constant betrayal from the very beginning have seriously affected Christian-Muslim relations. Christians, on the assurance of Jinnah, played a crucial role for the birth of Pakistan; yet Jinnah in his handpicked first Constituent Assembly did not choose a single Christian to represent Christians, while 17 Hindus and two Sikhs were selected by him.<sup>49</sup> A renowned Christian scholar, lawyer and politician, Joshua Fazl-ud-din, noted, 'As a matter of fact, right from the beginning, minor officials had

---

<sup>45</sup> Theodore Gabriel, *Christian Citizens of An Islamic State: The Pakistan Experience* (UK: Ashgate, 2007), 14.

<sup>46</sup> Rabis Ali, 'Packing their Bags: Christians moving to Thailand to escape violence, insecurity', in *The Express Tribune*, 15th July, 2014: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/735724/packing-their-bags-christians-moving-to-thailand-to-escape-violence-insecurity> (accessed 17th September 2014); 'Pakistani Christians moving to foreign counties out of fear', in *Deccan Chronicle*, 15th July 2014: [www.deccanchronicle.com/140715/world-neighbours/article/pakistani-christians-moving-foreign-countries-out-fear](http://www.deccanchronicle.com/140715/world-neighbours/article/pakistani-christians-moving-foreign-countries-out-fear) (accessed 17th September 2014).

<sup>47</sup> Yeshwa Younus, *Silent Migration of Pakistani Christians* (CNN iReport, 10th August 2013): <http://ireport.cnn.com/docs/DOC-1018327> (accessed 17th September 2014).

<sup>48</sup> Nazir S. Bhatti, '90% Pakistani Christian Favour Refugee status from UN after rising violence', in *Pakistan Christian Post*, 2008: [www.pakistanchristianpost.com/vieweditorial.php?editorialid=112](http://www.pakistanchristianpost.com/vieweditorial.php?editorialid=112) (accessed 17th September 2014).

<sup>49</sup> Sookhdeo, *A People Betrayed*, 86.

been harassing in Pakistan and openly asking them to leave Pakistan, which they characterised as a homeland exclusively for Muslims.’<sup>50</sup> Consequently, ‘Loyalty of non-Muslims to the state of Pakistan is doubted even by moderate Muslims’.<sup>51</sup> Twenty-five years ago a survey found that 80% of Christians felt they were second-class citizens in Pakistan.<sup>52</sup> Self-preservation, the security of Christians and church institutions, and survival are the main concerns of Pakistani Christians. In this extremely difficult context, what is the mission of the church of Christ in Pakistan? How should this mission be carried out?

### **What is the Mission of Church of Christ in Pakistan?**

I will reflect on this question as someone who is thoroughly convinced of his calling to witness to Christ in Pakistan. I believe that the mission of Christ’s church in Pakistan is no different from any other church. There is only one mission handed down to the church by the Lord of the church, Christ Jesus: to preach the kingdom, to make disciples from all nations and to proclaim the Lordship of Christ. The context of the mission may require different approaches, but the content of the mission can never change. Therefore, the real question is: How should we do mission in Pakistan? Expert missiologists and practitioners have developed many approaches for reaching out to Muslims. These approaches include: 1) mission through institutions, i.e. education, medical and social care; 2) bazaar preaching and distribution of Christian literature; 3) person-to-person; 4) polemic and apologetic approaches; and 5) Muslim-friendly translations of the Bible, etc. These generic approaches have their merits and demerits as well as relative successes and failures. However, all these approaches require ‘freedom to express and propagate one’s faith’. The following submission is given on the basis of the proposition that in Pakistan there is practically no freedom of faith. However, the church in Pakistan must be obedient to the command of her Lord and carry out her mission.

### **The Mission of Love**

Christian mission has its roots in divine love. Christ’s mission is rooted and grounded in the love of the Triune God: ‘Because God so loved the world...’ (John 3:16). Christ’s mission of love was directed, not only to the ugly, though harmless, and unlovable but also to unlovable enemies (Rom. 5:1-11). Muslims in Pakistan have, on social, religious and political

---

<sup>50</sup> Joshua Fazl-ud-din. *The Future of Christians in Pakistan* (Lahore: Punjabi Darbar Publishing, 1949), 68.

<sup>51</sup> Theodore Gabriel, *Christian Citizens of An Islamic State*, 37.

<sup>52</sup> Mr Pat (Patrick J. Roelle, SR), *Christians Under Siege* (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2009), 50.



grounds, generally taken Christians to be their enemies. Politically, Pakistani Christians are considered agents of the West, particularly of the USA, whom they call a great Satan and arch-enemy of Islam. Religiously, though the Qur'an's attitude towards Christians at certain points seems irenic, a number of verses clearly prohibit Muslims from befriending Christians (Surah 5:51& 57). Socially, Christians are despised and considered unclean for socialisation. There are a host of *hadiths* and Muslim scholars who following the Qur'an and *hadith* forbid friendship with non-Muslims. However, Christian mission to Muslims in Pakistan must be modelled after Christ's own mission – a mission based on love for one's enemies. Pakistan is sizzling with hatred. Sunnis hate Shi'as and Shi'as hate Sunnis. Deobandis hate Barelvis and vice versa. Together they hate Christians, Hindus, Ahmadis, Sikhs and other smaller religious communities. What Pakistan needs most is the love of Christ. The church in Pakistan, being the receptacle and carrier of divine love, must carry and share this love with Muslims of Pakistan.

### Overcoming Fear

One of the greatest impediments in Christian mission to Muslims is fear. The spirit of Islam is the spirit of fear. Since 9/11 terrorist and extremist Muslims have committed so many acts of violence and brutality that even the word Muslim and Islam strikes fear in the heart of non-Muslims. Beheadings in the course of 2014-15 and crucifixions of Christians by ISIS in Syria and Iraq, the destruction of churches and killing of Christians by Boko Haram in Nigeria, Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Taliban and other organisations in Pakistan, and especially the 2013 attack on All Saints' Church, Peshawar, that killed some 125 worshippers, have scared Christians from reaching out to Muslims. Blasphemy laws in Pakistan have additionally frightened Christians from sharing the Gospel with Muslims. If Christians are to obey Christ's command, then they must overcome the fear of Islam and Muslims. The key to overcoming fear is love (1 John 4:18) and trust in the Lord (1 John 5:4-5). Christ also commanded the missionaries he sent as sheep among the wolves: 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul' (Matt. 10:26). Given the recent history of Christian-Muslim relations, it is not easy; yet the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of love and forgiveness, is given to the church exactly to overcome such situations.

### Mission of Sacrifice

Christ's mission to his enemies was a mission in love, which meant a mission of self-giving and self-sacrifice. When Christ was about to begin his mission, he was identified by John the Baptist as 'the Lamb of God' that takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Put differently, he was a



lamb on a mission sent by God. As Christ sent his disciples to preach the good news of the kingdom, he also likened them to lambs (Luke 10) and sheep (Matt. 16). The Lord Jesus commanded, 'Go! I am sending you out like lambs/sheep among wolves' (Luke 10:3, Matt. 10:16). Some variations in these two passages are very interesting. Matthew's account clearly tells that Christ sent twelve apostles who were told that they were being sent like sheep among wolves. They were also given this important advice: 'Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves'. Luke's account informs us that Christ also appointed 72 others and told them he was sending them like lambs among wolves. Unlike the sheep, the lambs were not advised to be shrewd like snakes and innocent like doves. However, the mission is the same and so are the recipients: wolves. While sheep give birth to sheep and nurture them, lambs were raised only for sacrifice. Wolves do not differentiate among sheep and lambs; for their purpose, they are there to be killed and devoured.

We know that both sheep/lambs and wolves are being used here metaphorically. The Bible metaphorically calls cruel, savage, greedy, rapacious and destructive men: wolves (Matt. 7:15, John 10:12, Acts 20:29, Ezk 22:27). Mission to such men is extremely dangerous. While sheep/lambs have no freedom but to obey their Lord, wolves are not bound by any rules. They are free to attack, to kill and to devour. In contrast to modern western mission to Muslims, where missionaries operated under the protection of colonial guns, the mission of the lambs is carried out in a non-threatening, non-violent, self-denying and self-giving way. The only freedom Christians in Pakistan have is to offer their lives in obedience to their Lord, trusting in him and having the confidence that he is also the master of the wolves, who has the power to change wolves into lambs/sheep.

Along with sheep/lambs, two other important symbols for Christian mission to Muslims in Pakistan are 'salt' and 'light'. These are beautiful metaphors for the Christian minority. They represent something small in number, or less in quantity, but make a big impact. However, their usefulness and impact are seen only when they are used. Salt penetrates and makes impact only when consumed, and a lamp gives light and repels darkness only when it burns. Again, self-giving and self-sacrifice for the sake of others is emphasised. Christian mission is essentially sacrificial ministry for the sake of the world.

### **The Mission that Embraces and Finds Joy in the Midst of Suffering**

Dr Charles Amjad Ali in his lecture, *Islam: A Mission Failed*, referred to the inseparability of Christian mission and suffering when he asked this question to his American audience: 'What compromises have you made

that the state does not persecute you?’<sup>53</sup> All Christians should understand that becoming Christ’s disciple requires them to carry the cross (Matt. 10:38 & Luke 14:27) and thus to proclaim the Lordship of Christ under the shadow of the most horrific instrument of death. Therefore, Christian missionaries and sufferings can hardly be separated. The question is: are we bound to suffer or do we suffer willingly, do we whine and cry as we suffer, or do we feel honoured to suffer for ‘the name’ and thus find joy in the midst of our sufferings (Acts 5:41)? The church in Pakistan needs an apostolic spirit to obey God and defy human rules and regulations that forbid teaching and preaching in the name of Christ, an apostolic spirit that considers suffering for Christ a matter of honour and glory, thus experiencing peace in the midst of pain, and joy in the midst of sufferings and sorrows.

### Conclusion

Theodore Gabriel wrote: ‘Christians are the most important religious minority of Pakistan and their status and experience is a test case of the treatment of religious minorities in an Islamic state.’<sup>54</sup> The evidence presented above shows that although, before the creation of Pakistan, Christians were given full assurance of equal rights and freedom of religion, they soon began to experience marginalisation. Beginning with the 1956 Constitution, the successive amendments to the Constitution have systematically deprived them of freedom of faith. In the words of Iqbal, Christians still have permission to worship, under the watchful eyes of the Muslim policemen, but they do not have freedom to practise and propagate their faith. The most important word ‘freely’ was taken away from the Constitution by the dictator Zia al-Haq. In this way, religious freedom for minorities was ‘constitutionally murdered’. Blasphemy laws and public violence against religious minorities have further imposed a public embargo on the freedom to believe. However, Christians are called to be faithful to their calling and must carry out Christ’s mission in the power and presence of his Spirit, loving their enemies no matter what the cost may be, trusting in the power of Christ, not only to shut the frightening mouths of angry and hungry wolves, but to change them into lambs/sheep. There is nothing impossible for the Lord.

<sup>53</sup> Charles, Amjad Ali, February 2013, *Islam: A Mission Failed*: [vimeo.com/59154610](https://vimeo.com/59154610) (accessed: 26th September 2014).

<sup>54</sup> Gabriel, *Christian Citizens of An Islamic State*, 3.

# **FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND CHRISTIAN MISSION IN RUSSIA BEFORE AND AFTER THE ERA OF THE SOVIET UNION**

**Valentin Kozhuharov**

## **Introduction**

The past several decades of human history saw in the majority of the countries of the world the establishment of specific relations between religion and state where practising religion came to be perceived as a private matter and a private activity in society. Human rights and freedom of religion came as terms used by the secular (humanistic) state and not by religions: in religion, believers usually have few rights and little freedom, and this does not contradict their attitude to rights and freedoms as human beings living in society.

Whenever a religion seeks the protection of rights and freedoms for its members (when they are violated, as seen from the perspective of the secular state), it seeks protection whilst appealing to the secular powers and authorities. The same (seeking protection) is done by many (or all) religions and secular organisations in a country. In this way, it is difficult for a religion to expect that the rights and freedoms of everyone can be truly protected because human experience shows that it is almost impossible to provide equal rights and freedoms for every person in a society. There is no human community in the world (state, region or other locality) where every single person can enjoy the same rights and freedom, simply because in every country there are minorities and a majority, laws and habitual practices, cultural heritage and constant changes in society. All the time, religions and societies are trying to accommodate themselves to a contemporary (at any historical period) situation, and to the contemporary demands of people, authorities and institutions.

Today we can see instances of violence and repression on the part of both religions and secular powers. From the perspective of the religions, we agree that 'the relationship between religion and human rights is both problematic and unavoidable in all parts of the world. Religion... is unquestionably a formidable force for violence, repression, and chauvinism of untold dimensions. But religion is also a natural and necessary ally in the

global struggle for human rights'.<sup>1</sup> In today's struggle for human rights, on the one hand, and the internal need of the church to do mission and to witness to Christ in every nation, on the other, we can observe different relationships between religions and state in the different countries of the world. In some countries these relationships are tense and unpredictable, while in others they are more settled and regulated. Where is Russia in this? There is no simple answer to this question, yet a brief analysis of the relationships between religion and state, in connection with the mission of the church, may show where this country is positioned in relation to freedom of religion and freedom of witnessing to Christ. This analysis will show that Russia is not very different from other countries where Christianity is in the majority, and yet Russia presents a specific 'case' where one may find the conditions in the country to be unique and quite different from the situation of other countries.

The time boundary between past and present in this analysis can be relatively defined as the time before the Soviet Union was formed and the time during and after its dissolution, that is, before 1917-1922, during the communist oppression, and after 1991 when the last president of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, turned the power over to Yeltsin on 25th December of that year.

### **Freedom of Religion and Christian Mission in Russia before the Era of the Soviet Union**

In its contemporary interpretation, freedom of religion as theory and practice has predominantly been linked with the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* in 1789 which set forth 'the natural, inalienable and sacred rights of man', including the right of freedom of religious views as set out by its Article 10.<sup>2</sup> The formulations of the *Declaration* came as a response to the more liberal ideas of the Reformation, of 'free-thinkers', and of new economic theories.<sup>3</sup> From this

---

<sup>1</sup> John Witte Jr., 'The Religion and Human Rights Series Preface', in John Witte Jr. and Michael Bourdeaux (eds), *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia: The New War for Souls* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), ix.

<sup>2</sup> *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Lynn Hunt (Boston/New York: Bedford/St Martin's, 1996), 78.

<sup>3</sup> In 1776, some thirteen years before the French's *Declaration* was issued, Adam Smith published a work where he asserted that it was in the best interests of society as a whole to allow people to freely choose their own religion; according to Smith, this would prevent civil unrest and reduce intolerance. If there were several or many religions (sects, in his terms), they would be compelled to moderate their controversial doctrines and become more appealing to people; it is the free competition between religions, Smith asserted, that would bring stability and peace in society (cf Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of*

perspective, before the sixteenth century no society had theoretically developed and practically applied the principles of freedoms and rights as we understand them today. In all societies, the dominant religion used to persecute the followers of other religions, in some countries more severely, in others less.

The same was the practice in Russia. Eastern Orthodox Christianity had been the religion of the Russians for many centuries since the time the people of Rus were baptised in 988; up to 1905, the believers of other Christian confessions and of other religions were persecuted to one degree or another, and apostasy from Orthodoxy was treated as a punishable offence. In July 1805, Tsar Alexander I issued a decree stating that the Molokans were allowed to freely read the Bible while Orthodox clergy were prohibited from entering their homes.<sup>4</sup> Another decree of 1856, signed by Tsar Alexander II, permitted open worship at an Old Believers' church but, under the pressure of the Orthodox clergy, this was abandoned several months later.<sup>5</sup> And it was only the Orthodox Church that was allowed to do mission while all other non-Orthodox communities were forbidden from publicly preaching or witnessing to their faith.

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) was not only the state church but also one of the main economic powers in the country. This enabled it to organise extensive missionary activities far beyond the boundaries of the Russian nationhood. Between 1240 and 1580, most of the missionary activities were undertaken by monasteries and their monks;<sup>6</sup> both the Tsar's military forces and Orthodox clergy expanded the Russian territory (and also Orthodoxy) far beyond the Volga River steppes, starting with Tsar Ivan the Terrible in 1533;<sup>7</sup> expansion continued to Siberia and America in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, to Kazan, Kamchatka and then to China, Japan, Korea and Palestine.<sup>8</sup>

Many of these missionary efforts were undertaken in the course of expansion of the Russian Empire, although the Orthodox missionaries truly converted into Christianity dozens of peoples living in vast territories between Moscow and Siberia, America and Asia. The mission of the ROC

*Nations* (Pennsylvania State Electronic Classics Edition: Pennsylvania State University, republished 2005 [1776]), 643-49.

<sup>4</sup> In English, this was affirmed in Geraldine Fagan, *Believing in Russia – Religious Policy after Communism* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge 2013), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Fagan, *Believing in Russia*, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Cf Andrei B. Effimov, *Ocherki po istorii missionerstva Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi* (Moskva: Izdatelstvo Pravoslavnogo sviato-Tikhonovskogo universiteta, 2007), (*Essays on history of mission of the Russian Orthodox Church*, Moscow: Orthodox University of St Tikhon's Publishing, 2007), 62-86.

<sup>7</sup> Effimov, *Essays on history of mission*, 88-97.

<sup>8</sup> Effimov, *Essays on history of mission*, 98-151 (on Siberia and America), 198-212 (on Kazan), 213-40 (on Kamchatka), 241-340 (on China, Japan, Korea and Palestine).

obtained a more ecclesiastical character after the establishment of the Orthodox Missionary Society in 1870.<sup>9</sup> Up till the beginning of the twentieth century, the Society managed to organise hundreds of missionary activities in many of Russia's regions and far abroad.<sup>10</sup>

It was at that time that the famous triad 'Orthodoxy, autocracy, nationhood' was proclaimed;<sup>11</sup> its notion still lives on in the minds of many Russians. This is true for other countries in Eastern Europe where Orthodoxy is in the majority: many Christians continue to believe in a good Orthodox tsar and in an Orthodox state where a perfect 'symphony' between church and state exists. These ideas were well developed by some Russian authors of the nineteenth century<sup>12</sup> and were unreservedly accepted by many Slavic Orthodox believers in different countries.

Not long after the turn of the twentieth century, the landmark 1905 decree came which gave much more religious freedom to Russian people. On 17th April 1905, Nikolai II signed the order entitled *On Strengthening the Foundations of Religious Tolerance*. It contains seventeen Articles and each of them gives a degree of freedom to the people of Russia. The most notable are: those renouncing Orthodoxy will not be persecuted any more (Art. 1), Christians of any confession are allowed to raise adopted children in their own faith (Art. 4), Old Believers should be called 'those keeping old rituals' and not schismatics (Art. 7), Old Believers and schismatics (sectarians) may have their own clergy (Arts. 9 and 10), all places of worship of the non-Orthodox that were closed in the past should be reopened (Art. 12), non-Orthodox clergy are given the right to teach in schools in the language of the local people (Art. 14), the intention is expressed to review the legislation concerning Muslims (Art. 15) and Buddhists (Art. 16) who from now on would not be called idol-worshippers and pagans but lamaites.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Effimov, *Essays on history of mission*, 476.

<sup>10</sup> By 1900, the Society had 53 diocesan missionary centres, more than 16,000 missionaries, and it supported mission work in eight Siberian missions, and in several European, Japanese and American ones (cf Effimov, *Essays on history of mission*, 480-81).

<sup>11</sup> The triad was commonly attributed to Nikolai I (cf Fagan, *Believing in Russia*, 52); in fact, it was first used by Russia's minister of education Sergei Uvarov in 1833 and adopted by Nikolai I (cf N.P. Barsoukov, *Zhizn' i trudy M.P. Pogodina*, kn. 4, Sankt Peterburgh, 1891), 83 (N.P. Barsoukov, *Life and Works of M.P. Pogodin*). It is believed that the 'Russian' triad came as an antithesis to the Great French Revolution's motto: 'Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité'.

<sup>12</sup> One of the most popular was, and still is, that of Dmitri Khomiakov, *Pravoslavie, samoderzhavie, narodnost* (Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationhood), (Moscow, Institute of Russian Civilization, 2011), especially 233-89.

<sup>13</sup> Ukaz ob ukreplenii nachal veroterpimosti (1905), (*Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii*, sobr. 3, tom 25:1905, Sankt Peterburgh, 1908), 237-38 (Decree 'On Strengthening the Foundations of Religious Tolerance' (1905), (Complete Code of Laws of the Russian Empire, Collection No 3, Volume 25, 1905).

As far as the mission of the non-Orthodox Christian communities in Russia is concerned, by now it has become obvious that no other Christian confession or other religion was allowed to undertake any preaching or public ministry. Numerous are the decrees and other internal regulations of the Russian Empire which attach exceptional importance and role only to the Orthodox Church. Nevertheless, the policy of several Russian tsars to accommodate dissidents from other Christian non-Orthodox churches in different regions of Russia resulted in the formation of non-Orthodox communities in the Empire. In 1576 the first Lutheran church in Moscow was built. Certainly, the first Lutherans did not carry out any missionary activity, and the Russian authorities diligently observed the congregation in Moscow to make sure that it was composed only of Germans, not Russians.<sup>14</sup> History has examples where Protestant preachers were executed because of their public activity.<sup>15</sup>

In 1832 all Lutheran churches and organisations in Russia united in the 'Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Russia'. Head of this new organisation was the Russian Tsar but he did not interfere with the religious activities of the Lutheran Church. Its members were only foreign immigrants (mainly Germans), not native Russians. It should be noted that German villages were scattered over an enormous territory between Moldova and the Far East. In the 1850s the Baptist church arrived in Russia. Although the Baptists were not allowed to do mission, their activity still attracted a good number of Russian Molokans who joined the Baptist Church, starting in the 1890s.<sup>16</sup> There is no evidence that native Russians turned to Protestantism or Catholicism at that time.<sup>17</sup>

### **Freedom of Religion and Christian Mission in Russia during and after the Era of the Soviet Union**

#### *Before 1991*

The Revolution of October 1917 entirely changed the Russian people's life and Russia's position and importance in Europe and in the world. Only a couple of months after the Revolution swept away the hopes of millions of believers (but fulfilled the hopes of other millions), the new atheistic power

<sup>14</sup> Cf Sergei Filatov i Alexandra Styopina, 'Russkoe liuteranstvo mezhdru protestantizmom, pravoslaviem i katolitsizmom', *Druzhba Narodov*, No 9, 2002 (Sergei Filatov and Alexandra Styopina, 'Russian Lutheranism between Protestantism, Orthodoxy and Catholicism', *Friendship of Peoples*, No 9, 2002), 43.

<sup>15</sup> For instance, there was a pastor by name Kulman who tried to preach among native Russians and who was burnt at the stake by Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich (1648-1676), cf Filatov and Styopina, 'Russkoe liuteranstvo', 44.

<sup>16</sup> Filatov and Styopina, 'Russkoe liuteranstvo', 46-47.

<sup>17</sup> Filatov and Styopina, 'Russkoe liuteranstvo', 47.

issued a decree: *On Separation between Church and State and between School and the Church*. Although the decree separated the two, it nevertheless provided the citizens of the new state (since 1922, the Soviet Union) with freedom of religion or no religion (Art. 3), freedom of practising religion, providing this did not infringe on other citizens' rights and did not disturb public order (Art. 5); the school must be separated from the state but citizens have the right to study religion or teach their children religion as a private matter (Art. 9), religious and ecclesiastical societies fall under the regulations of the private organisations and they are not supported or favoured by the state or the local authorities (Art. 10).<sup>18</sup>

As in many other countries in the world, so also in Russia at that time there was law and there were habitual practices in society determined by tradition (the so-called 'habitual laws' or unwritten laws). On the other hand, year by year the new Communist powers tried to convince the citizens of Russia that religion was a mythology and fairy tales, and that it had to be eradicated from the minds and hearts of the 'new citizens' if they were to build the society of the future – the Communist society. These ideas spread quickly, especially among those in power who did not hesitate to suppress any religious activity, to persecute believers and send them to labour camps, prisons, or to simply murder them, to appropriate every single religious property and asset. Every expression of faith was considered 'counter-revolutionary activity'. The population was slowly made more and more atheistic.<sup>19</sup>

The above conditions confined ecclesiastical activities to the area of private life; the different religious organisations merely existed but did not function properly. And no missionary activity was allowed or undertaken, while preaching was unthinkable in those times. 'The Church was plunged into silence; it became the Church behind bars.'<sup>20</sup> The severe persecution made many Orthodox Christians and theologians leave their home country and form the so-called Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.<sup>21</sup> Within the Soviet Union, at the 'official' level, the Russian Orthodox Church continued to exist but its role in society was extremely minimal. Although relations between church and state after World War Two changed to some extent (especially considering the church's role in preserving the spirit and the determination of the Russian soldiers), the church was never allowed to

Copyrighted Material

<sup>18</sup> Cf *Svod zakonov Rossiiskoi Sovetskoi Federativnoi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki*, tom 1, Moskva, 1988, str. 861 (*Code of Laws of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic*, Volume 1, Moscow, 1988, 861).

<sup>19</sup> In 1925, the 'Union of ungodly people' was created, which in 1929 adopted the name 'Union of the militant ungodly people', and in its heydays it counted some 5.67 million members (cf Effimov, *Essays on history of mission*, 608).

<sup>20</sup> Effimov, *Essays on history of mission*, 610.

<sup>21</sup> Cf I.M. Andreev, *Kratkii obzor istorii Russkoi Tserkvi ot revoliutsii do nashih dnei* (*Brief review of the history of the Russian Church since the times of the Revolution up to today*), (Jordanville, NY: 1951), 23-26.



occupy a significant place in Russian society in any obvious way until the time when the new direction of the Communist regime called *perestroika* (restructuring) was proclaimed and adopted in practice. The celebrations in 1988 in connection with the millennium of the ROC made Christianity much more visible in society. And it was only after the political changes in 1990 and 1991 that Christians in Russia (as well as the believers of other faiths) found themselves to be free of persecution and oppression.

### *After 1991*

Amidst the chaotic year of 1990, a new law called *On Freedom of Religion* was adopted on 25th October 1990. Not long after, it was criticised for its ineffectiveness and for allowing local government authorities to adopt their own laws in order to prohibit proselytising activities of ‘foreign’ (that is, non-Russian and non-Orthodox) missionaries.<sup>22</sup> In many of Russia’s regions, new tensions between religious groups appeared which ultimately made the Russian government develop a new law to define relations between religions and Russian society. ‘The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations’ (1997) reflected these tensions and placed serious restrictions on registration of religious organisations and thus on the activities of religious groups of foreign origin.<sup>23</sup> This new law,<sup>24</sup> still effective in Russia today, created a lot of controversy both within the country and abroad, and it was both praised and condemned.

One of the most controversial issues of the law is the notion of ‘historic’ or ‘traditional’ religion as opposed to the new religions and religious movements which only recently (dating back to 1997) entered Russia. Although some authors have noted that the law does not contain such notions in itself,<sup>25</sup> still the opinion that the new legislation has affirmed a favoured role for Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism and neglected

<sup>22</sup> Cf Human Rights Without Frontiers Correspondent in Russia, ‘FECRIIS and its Affiliate in Russia. The Orthodox Clerical Wing of FECRIIS’, in Danny Schäfer and Corinna Schwarzer (eds), *Freedom of Religion or Belief. Anti-Sect Movements and State Neutrality. A Case Study: FECRIIS, Religion – Staat – Gesellschaft, Zeitschrift für Glaubensformen und Weltanschauungen*, 13. Jahrgang 2012 (Heft 2: Lit Verlag Dr W. Hopf, Berlin, 2012), 269. (On FECRIIS, see footnote 995 below.)

<sup>23</sup> ‘FECRIIS and its Affiliate in Russia’, 269.

<sup>24</sup> Entitled ‘O svobode sovesti i o religioznyih objedineniyah (On the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations), it came into force on 24th September 1997 and was published in *Sobranie zakonodatelstva Rossiskoi Federatsii* (Russian Federation’s Collection of Legislation), 1997, No. 39, Item 4465 (Federal Law No. 125).

<sup>25</sup> Cf Geraldine Fagan, correctly writing that ‘the 1997 law’s preamble does not in fact mention the word “traditional”; it also lists Christianity (curiously implying Orthodoxy to be something different) and unspecified “other” religions’ (Fagan, *Believing in Russia*, 122). It should be added that the words ‘traditional’ and ‘historical’ do not occur in the document at all.

all the other religions, remains widespread, both within Russia and outside the country. It is specifically the ROC that further developed the notion of traditional and historic religions in order to prevent other – mostly other Christian – religious communities from spreading in the country. And it is the ROC that tries – and often successfully – to secure the support of both the central power (government and presidency) and local authorities in its struggle to bring Orthodoxy back to the Russian people.<sup>26</sup>

If we follow events after 1997, we can see the following picture of relations between religious freedom and Christian mission.

In 1995, the Missionary Department of the ROC was established; and the same year it developed a 'Concept' of missionary activity – but later it was revised twice (in 2005 and 2007). The ROC's missionaries undertook more substantial missionary activities only after 1999 and 2000, and initially much of their work aimed to convert into Orthodoxy mainly other non-Russian ethnic groups living in Russia.<sup>27</sup> After the new revised version of the Concept appeared in 2007 (and after it had been widely discussed within the Orthodox dioceses in Russia), the ROC's mission department became specifically concerned about 'non-traditional religious and non-religious worldviews, destructive cults and totalitarian sects'.<sup>28</sup> In its documents, the words 'traditional' and 'historic' become more and more frequent, implying that all the non-traditional and 'sectarian' religions had no place in Russian society or its 'traditional' Orthodox culture. It is a fact that the ROC has undertaken enormous missionary activities on vast Russian territories where many thousands of people were converted to Christianity (Orthodoxy), and hundreds of mission centres, schools, churches, medical centres, etc. were established.<sup>29</sup> We may wonder, however, whether this would be achieved to such a successful degree if some of these activities had not been supported by the local authorities where the ROC's missionaries operated.

<sup>26</sup> Robert C. Blitt is one of the authors who contributed to revealing the close (and often interdependent) relationship between secular authorities and the ROC, especially in his 'One New President, One New Patriarch, and a Generous Disregard for the Constitution: A Recipe for the Continuing Decline of Secular Russia', in *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law*, Vol. 43 (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Law School, 2010), 1337-68, and in his 'Whither Secular Bear? The Russian Orthodox Church's Strengthening Influence on Russia's Domestic and Foreign Policy', in *Fides et Libertas: The Journal of the International Religious Liberty Association* (Silver Spring, MD: 2011), 89-125.

<sup>27</sup> In English, this activity was described in Valentin Kozhuharov, *Towards an Orthodox Christian Theology of Mission: an Interpretive Approach* (Bulgaria, Veliko Tarnovo: Vesta Publishing, 2006), 23-50.

<sup>28</sup> Valentin Kozhuharov, 'Mission in an Orthodox Christian Context: Witnessing to Christ as Pastoral Responsibility', in Wonsuk Ma and Kenneth Ross (eds), *Mission Spirituality and Authentic Discipleship* (Oxford, Regnum: Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, Volume 14, 2013), 119.

<sup>29</sup> Cf Kozhuharov, 'Mission in an Orthodox Christian Context', 117.

Another ‘apologetic’ argument that was intended to strengthen the ROC’s position among Russian people are the three concepts, ‘totalitarian sect’, ‘spiritual security’ and ‘canonical territory’, coined after the 1997 law had been passed.<sup>30</sup> The notion of ‘totalitarian sect’ was not only widely adopted by the ROC, but it also took on quite blurred forms. Under this term one could find references not only to some Protestant and Muslim communities (especially the followers of the Turkish theologian Said Nursi<sup>31</sup>), but also to Catholic and other Orthodox groups that split from the ROC and became ‘schismatic’. The notion of ‘spiritual security’ received much importance after the so-called Anti-Extremism law was adopted in 2002 and the ‘Zorin Report’ on religious extremism appeared. It was this report that ‘deemed Catholics to be Russia’s greatest security threat. Western Protestants and new religious movements, including Jehovah’s Witnesses, Scientologists and Satanists, posed the next greatest threat. Islamic extremists were further down the list’, affirms Zoë Knox.<sup>32</sup> Both the terms ‘totalitarian sect’ and ‘spiritual security’ are being widely used in the activity of some organisations to ‘prove’ how dangerous for Russia the ‘non-traditional’ and ‘non-historic’ religious organisations are.<sup>33</sup> ‘Spiritual

<sup>30</sup> Fagan even calculated that in 1993 the notion of ‘canonical territory’ was mentioned only once, and by 2008 its media usage came up to 1,252 instances (cf Fagan, *Believing in Russia*, 110); the author continues to suggest that the three terms allowed its proponents and sympathisers ‘to invoke against non-establishment faiths with impunity. Thereby shifting popular discursive boundaries towards the Orthodox-centred model of Russian national identity, these terms succeeded in undercutting Russia’s official religious policy of equality before the law for all faith communities’ (Fagan, *Believing in Russia*, 120).

<sup>31</sup> While analysing the current situation in Russia concerning freedoms and religion, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom concludes that, ‘In the context of growing human rights abuses, religious freedom conditions in Russia suffered serious setbacks. New 2012 laws and 2014 amendments to the anti-extremism law were used against religious individuals and groups, particularly Jehovah’s Witnesses and Muslim readers of Turkish theologian Said Nursi’ (US Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Annual Report 2014*, Washington, DC, 2014), 140.

<sup>32</sup> Zoë Knox, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church: Religion in Russia after Communism* (Abingdon, UK: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 171.

<sup>33</sup> One such organisation, called FECRIS (a French abbreviation for ‘European Federation of Research and Information Centres on Sectarianism’) is extremely critical of the ‘new’ religious movements (mainly Christian, but named by FECRIS as ‘pseudo-Christian’), and its aim is to preserve the status quo of the ‘main’ Christian confessions, specifically Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy, which on the other hand explains its wide support by France and Russia. ‘Globally, FECRIS plays on two registers: pathologising and criminalising members of religious minorities. The faithful of the so-called sects are said to be victims and their leaders are supposedly delinquents,’ writes Régis Dericquebourg (cf Régis Dericquebourg: ‘FECRIS: European Federation of Research and Information Centres on Sectarianism’, in Danny Schäfer and Corinna Schwarzer (eds), ‘Freedom of

security', its authors note, is not so much a governmental concern as it is a concern for the ROC.<sup>34</sup>

One more problematic issue in Russia is the relationship between church and state, which is not a simple issue to discuss. We may agree with some authors that the separation of church and state for the Orthodox Church could mean 'that the Church – to the exclusion of all other religious groups – can press its views on the secular government "in the most varied spheres", even to the point of urging policies contrary to Russia's Constitution. At the same time, the state cannot interfere in the Church's dealings but is urged to interfere with or restrict the freedom of other religious groups'<sup>35</sup>; we may also accept that 'The ROC has been actively participating in shaping and executing Russia's foreign policy, not only in the "near abroad" specifically, but more generally across the European continent and beyond'.<sup>36</sup> Still, there are other related questions which need to be clarified. This brings us to the conclusion of this study where we have tried to keep the balance between the 'totalitarian views' on church-state relations in Russia and the more moderate and objective (as far as possible) view of the interdependence of church and state in any country where Christianity is the majority, including Russia.

### Concluding remarks

It seems fair to us to affirm once again that the ROC is much more favoured by the state than the other religious communities in the country. On the other hand, it seems fair, too, to clarify that this 'favouritism' is related to the overall religious life of Russia. Several points can be made in this respect:

- It is a fact that all religions and believers were persecuted in Communist Russia, and today many of them try to overcome restrictions by the state on their activity. In many instances, these restrictions apply to the ROC also.

Copyrighted Material

Religion or Belief. Anti-Sect Movements and State Neutrality. A Case Study: FECRIS', in *Religion – Staat – Gesellschaft, Zeitschrift für Glaubensformen und Weltanschauungen*, 13. Jahrgang 2012 (Heft 2: Lit Verlag Dr W. Hopf, Berlin, 2012), 188).

<sup>34</sup> Cf Daniel P. Payne, 'Spiritual Security, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Russian Foreign Ministry: Collaboration or Cooptation?' in *Journal of Church and State* (2010), 52 (4), 712-72, where the term is considered in close connection with the 2002 Anti-Extremist law and the collaboration between the ROC and the Russian Foreign Ministry.

<sup>35</sup> Blitt, 'One New President, One New Patriarch', 1368.

<sup>36</sup> Blitt, 'Whither Secular Bear?', 89.

- It is clear that not only the ROC but also other Christian communities work together whilst defining those human values which constitute a true Christian witness.<sup>37</sup>
- The number of Protestant Christians in Russia continues to grow rapidly, the result of the effective missionary activity of many of the Protestant communities in the country.<sup>38</sup>
- Violations of freedom of religion and of human rights are carried out by the ROC and some governmental officials, but such (or similar) violations occur in many other countries of the world and they are done under similar circumstances.<sup>39</sup>
- Sometimes Christian churches and organisations carry out mission in a Christian country without even acknowledging local traditions and beliefs, or even worse – without even knowing them or trying to understand them; this is true for some evangelical missionary organisations sending missionaries to Russia ‘to bring the real Christ’ to the Russian people.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> One of the more recent meetings of the *Inter-Christian Consultative Council of Russia* took place on 26 February 2014 where representatives of all the main Christian communities in Russia were discussing issues of family and orphan children, and decided on a common declaration which reflected the views of all Christians in the country (cf [www.xmkk.org/2014/02/522](http://www.xmkk.org/2014/02/522) – in Russian only).

<sup>38</sup> Cf data from Pew Research Center: [www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/table-christian-population-in-numbers-by-country](http://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/table-christian-population-in-numbers-by-country) where we can see that more than 2½ million people are now Protestant Christians, and some 800,000 belong to the Catholic Church. Protestantism in Russia is often called ‘new social phenomenon’ and many native Russian Protestants share the same values as those shared by their Orthodox counterparts (cf Roman Lunkin, ‘Rossiiskii Protestantism: evangelskie khristiane kak novyi sotsialnyi fenomen’, v *Sovremennaya Evropa*: Institute Evropy Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk, No 3 (59), 2014, 133-43 (Roman Lunkin, ‘Russian Protestantism: Evangelical Christians as a New Social Phenomenon’, in *Contemporary Europe*, Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences, No 3 (59), 2014, 133-43).

<sup>39</sup> This by no means justifies the violations done by the ROC and the Russian state. For more details on violations of freedom of religion and human rights in other countries, see the findings of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom for Western Europe where different violations have been recorded in France, Denmark, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Luxemburg, etc. (especially where activities of ‘cults’ and ‘sects’ are prohibited, such as in France, Austria, Belgium and Germany), US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 163-64. The publications of the European Court of Human Rights show that Russia is not the most frequent violator of rights in comparison with many other countries, see: [www.echr.coe.int/Pages/home.aspx?p=home](http://www.echr.coe.int/Pages/home.aspx?p=home) and the subheading ‘Recent Judgements’.

<sup>40</sup> Cf the strong criticism of such practices in Mark Elliott and Anita Deyneka, ‘Protestant Missionaries in the Former Soviet Union’, in Witte, *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia*, 197-225; in an issue of the British Evangelical Missionary Alliance, the authors affirm: ‘Mission teams which say “We are taking Jesus to

- No one should condone governmental interference when at the court of law a political offence is claimed to be religious hatred, as is the case with the music group's Pussy Riot of 2012,<sup>41</sup> and at the same time all religious organisations in Russia and in the world would insist on preserving appropriate behaviour and attitudes at their sacred places of worship.

What could people expect in the near future? After 2015 there may be some changes in the whole situation in Russia, including the relationship between freedom of religion and Christian mission. In 2016 a new premier will be elected, and two years later a new president. Many believe these will not be Putin and Medvedyev. Meanwhile the ROC may learn lessons and try to co-operate more extensively with other Christian communities in the country; the same applies to the Protestant and Catholic churches too: they also need to find their way to Orthodox Christians and the common cultural heritage of the Russian people (which, obviously, is not only Orthodox but multi-Christian and multi-religious). A Pan-Orthodox Council has been planned for 2016 and we would expect that its decisions would make Orthodoxy much more appealing to people and much more open to other Christian traditions. People in Russia and throughout the world pray that it will not take a global disaster to bring Christians together united in their faith in Jesus Christ, but that wise decisions and far-discerning steps will show that the Christians of Russia are not alone in their struggle but part of the worldwide body of Christ.

---

Russia" show they don't understand the situation at all. Nobody is taking Jesus to Russia. He has been there all the time! His Holy Spirit was moving behind the Iron Curtain before Christians from the West could go there' (in Evangelical Missionary Alliance, 'Working in Central and Eastern Europe: Guidelines for Christians', London, 1994), 3. Even at the end of 2014, there were numerous Western (mainly American) missionary organisations recruiting missionaries to Russia while advertising 'Help to spread the Good News of Salvation to the Russian People' and affirming that 'The former Soviet Union is one of the most fertile fields for evangelism today!' ([www.russianmissions.org](http://www.russianmissions.org)), or proclaiming that 'the people of Russia are still recovering from oppression. Come bring the hope of Christ to them' (<http://focusmissions.org/russia>), or 'Serving the Russian People for Jesus' ([www.russianchristianmissions.org](http://www.russianchristianmissions.org)), and many others.

<sup>41</sup> In a recent analysis, an author again confirms that 'the court hearing the case refused to recognize the political nature of the performance and based its decision on religious hatred', and that 'The court prosecuted the activists, who protested Putin's re-election for a third Presidential term and fourth sequential term in government, under the Criminal Code, classifying their performance as a religious hate crime and abuse of church and religion' (Tatyana Beschastna, 'Freedom of expression in Russia as it Relates to Criticism of the Government', in *Emory International Law Review*, Vol. 27 (2014), Atlanta, GA: 2014, 1131-32).

# WESTERN EUROPE – MARGINALISATION OF CHRISTIANS THROUGH SECULARISATION?

Lars Dahle

## Introductory Observations

Freedom of belief is an increasingly significant issue for Christians in contemporary Europe, alongside the closely related concerns of freedom of conscience and freedom of expression. This was highlighted in a significant report to the Parliamentary Assembly of the European Council (PACE) on *Tackling intolerance and discrimination in Europe with a special focus on Christians*. The rapporteur was Valeriu Ghiletschi, who is both a Moldavian politician and president of the European Baptist Federation. In his report, Ghiletschi draws attention to:

the absence of any Europe-wide surveys on intolerance and discrimination against Christians. However, an illustrative cross-section of incidents that have taken place over the past three years are referred to in this report, based on national reports provided by governments, NGOs and civic society organisations. With this report, I intend to shed light on a phenomenon which is largely overlooked.<sup>1</sup>

One of the central sources referred to in Ghiletschi's report is the European Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians:<sup>2</sup>

(35.) In its report published in April 2014, the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians provided information about 158 incidents, which took place in 2013 in member-states of the European Union, as well as in San Marino and Switzerland. During a hearing organised by the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination on 5th March 2014 in Vienna, Dr Gudrun Kugler (Director of the Observatory) underlined that vandalism of religious sites was widespread in Europe and that numerous cases concerned Christian sites. Dr Kugler indicated that, *while there was no persecution of Christians in Europe, forms of intolerance were emerging and that negative stereotyping of Christians was an issue*.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Valeriu Ghiletschi, *Document 13660: Report to The Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination. Tackling intolerance and discrimination in Europe with a special focus on Christians* (Strasbourg: Parliamentary Assembly – Council of Europe (PACE), 7th January 2015), 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> [www.intoleranceagainsthchristians.eu](http://www.intoleranceagainsthchristians.eu)

<sup>3</sup> Ghiletschi, *Report to the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination*, 9. (Italics are mine.) For further reference, see 'Observatory on Intolerance and



As illustrated by these quotes, Ghiletschi's widely respected report<sup>4</sup> provides us with a helpful framework for exploring the current relationship between freedom of belief and Christian mission in Europe at large. However, due to the limited space available, the wide variety of current European contexts,<sup>5</sup> and my own perspective as based in western/northern Europe, it is impossible in this chapter to do full justice to the European context as a whole. I have therefore chosen to focus on western Europe, whenever appropriate, in view also of its unique post-Christendom context and its unique global role as promoter of secular worldviews.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter presupposes an understanding of Christian mission as being 'from everywhere to everywhere',<sup>7</sup> thus including western Europe as one of the geographical contexts of mutual missional reflection and action. Such a missional approach to Europe and the West was pioneered in the late 20th century by Lesslie Newbigin: 'The Western church finds itself in a missionary situation because the radical secularisation of Western society has changed "old Christendom" into a mission field.'<sup>8</sup>

I will explore the relationship between freedom of religion and Christian mission in western Europe at four closely interrelated levels, i.e. the legal, the attitudinal, the plausibility, and the credibility levels. This exploration leads to some concluding reflections on missional implications.

### **The Legal Level: Formal Protections and Ambivalent Practices**

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion are protected at the pan-European level by Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights:

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

---

Discrimination against Christians', in *Data Collection and Submission to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) 2013 Annual Report on Hate Crimes*, 9th April 2014.

<sup>4</sup> On 29th January 2015, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) accepted Ghiletschi's resolution on 'Tackling intolerance and discrimination in Europe with a special focus on Christians' by a large majority (67:2). This historic resolution is included as an appendix to this chapter.

<sup>5</sup> 'Looking around, we should also note the different kinds of Europeans among whom we live: Post-Christian, post-communist, post-modern, post-migrant and post-secular Europeans each require tailored approaches. There is no one-size-fits-all strategy' (Jeff Fountain, 'Europe: A Most Strategic Mission Field', in *Lausanne Global Analysis*, 3.6 (November 2014): [www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2014-11/europe-2](http://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2014-11/europe-2))

<sup>6</sup> See later references to Jeff Fountain and Greg Pritchard.

<sup>7</sup> See 'Edinburgh 2010 Common Call', paragraph 7: [www.edinburgh2010.org](http://www.edinburgh2010.org)

<sup>8</sup> Donald Le Roy Stults, *Grasping Truth and Reality: Lesslie Newbigin's Theology of Mission to the Western World* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 23.



2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.<sup>9</sup>

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion have traditionally been considered foundational for a democratic and pluralist society, and in legal practice should be upheld as such.

Four high-profile cases from January 2013 in the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)<sup>10</sup> provide an illustration of current legal practice in Europe as relating to these freedoms. All four cases came from the United Kingdom, with a focus on 'the place of religion, and a religiously formed conscience, in modern European society. Two were about symbols, and were probably themselves symbolic of wider disputes about the place of religion in public life. The other two concerned the reluctance of some Christians to be involved in apparent affirmation of homosexual practices'.<sup>11</sup>

When reviewing these four cases, ambivalent legal practices appear.<sup>12</sup> In terms of the first two cases, the two judgements pull in opposite directions:

There is a fundamental right to manifest one's faith, but on the other hand, circumstances may mean that it is inappropriate for that right to be exercised. Much is left to the discretion of the employer, and there is room for continued controversy (and no doubt lawsuits) about such matters. The Court's

<sup>9</sup> Article 9, The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), (formally the *Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*): <http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/en/Treaties/Html/005.htm>. For an overview of the protection of freedom of thought, conscience and religion in other legal instruments in the European context, see Ghilechi, *Report to the Committee*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Whereas the first case concerned a British Airways (BA) employee who wanted to wear a cross as a sign of her Christian faith, in violation of BA's uniform code, the second case concerned a nurse on a geriatric ward who was not allowed to wear her cross on duty, due to Health & Safety reasons. The third case concerned a counsellor working for a private, national, relationship counselling service. As a practising Christian, he found himself unwilling to work on sexual issues with homosexual couples, and lost his job. The fourth case concerned a civil registrar who, as a practising Christian, was unwilling to register civil partnerships for same-sex couples after they had been introduced. See *Eweida and Others v United Kingdom* (UCHR archives).

<sup>11</sup> Roger Trigg, 'New Threats to Religious Freedom in Europe and Their Implications', in *Lausanne Global Analysis* (March 2013) 2.2: [www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2013-03/new-threats-to-religious-freedom-in-europe-and-their-implications](http://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2013-03/new-threats-to-religious-freedom-in-europe-and-their-implications)

<sup>12</sup> See also Ian Leigh and Andrew Hamblen, 'Religious Symbols, Conscience, and the Rights of Others', in *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* (February 2014) 3.1, 2-24: <http://ojlr.oxfordjournals.org/content/3/1/2.full>

decisions may have been cleverly nuanced, but they cannot be said to give clear guidance.<sup>13</sup>

When it comes to the homosexual issues cases, the two judgements both affirm ‘gay rights’ over against the claims from the Christian applicants. In the case of the counsellor, ECHR ‘sided with the English courts in backing the employer’s right to secure the implementation of a service without discrimination’.<sup>14</sup> Concerning the case of the civil registrar, the Court stated that ‘in its case-law... it has held that differences in treatment based on sexual orientation require particularly serious reasons by way of justification’.<sup>15</sup> Thus, in these two latter cases, the Court dismissed the applicants’ claim for reasonable accommodation.

It should be noted, however, that the January 2015 PACE resolution on ‘Tackling intolerance and discrimination in Europe with a special focus on Christians’ calls on all member-states of the European Council to ‘promote reasonable accommodation within the principle of indirect discrimination’.<sup>16</sup> Such a consistent legal practice at the national level in Europe would clearly enhance religious freedom, also for Christians in public arenas and in the workplace. This would counter the present tendency that the idea of state ‘neutrality’ in regard to religion, denuding the public sphere of all religious influence, is ‘being paraded as a European core value’.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Attitudinal Level: Ambivalent Trends of Tolerance and Intolerance**

When moving from the legal to the attitudinal level, we should note that the growing limitations in Europe on religions in public life come from at least two different sources:

On the one hand, more secularist countries such as France and Belgium are stressing their centuries-old concept of *laïcité* [secularity] to prevent further incursions of religion into public life. On the other hand, both varieties of Orthodox countries, Russian and Greek, are citing their even older fight against the incursions of Islam into Europe in order to justify their constraints on recent Muslim immigrants and other dangerous ‘sects’, ‘cults’, and minority religions.<sup>18</sup>

When focusing on western Europe, we find an ambivalent post-modern context in relation to freedom of religion and Christian mission:

<sup>13</sup> Trigg, ‘New Threats to Religious Freedom’.

<sup>14</sup> Trigg, ‘New Threats to Religious Freedom’.

<sup>15</sup> Quote in Trigg, ‘New Threats to Religious Freedom’.

<sup>16</sup> On ‘the concept of reasonable accommodation for religious reasons’, see Ghiletschi, *Report to the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination*, 12-13.

<sup>17</sup> Trigg, ‘New Threats to Religious Freedom’.

<sup>18</sup> Os Guinness, *The Global Public Square: Religious Freedom and the Making of a World Safe for Diversity* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP, 2013), 108.

On the one hand, honest questions arise in a post-modern context as a result of a widespread cultural *openness* to personal stories and arguments related to the epistemic permission of the Christian faith. On the other hand, the Christian... encounters a widespread cultural *aversion* towards claims and arguments related to the epistemic obligation of the Christian faith.<sup>19</sup>

The European public universities<sup>20</sup> are usually considered to be among the most secular institutions on the continent, often operating with some restrictions for Christian witness and mission. However, the recent pan-European missional initiative FEUER (Fellowship of Evangelists in the Universities of Europe) provides an illustration of considerable cultural openness towards exploring essential Christian truth claims in many university contexts across Europe, both among faculty and students.<sup>21</sup> It is worth noting, however, that such university missions, and the work of Christian Unions at universities at large, were a few years ago at the centre of a major debate in the United Kingdom in relation to a proposed Parliamentary Bill against terrorism.<sup>22</sup> Because of this public debate, 'a free speech safeguard was introduced in the new anti-terror Bill, following widespread concerns that Christian Unions and other university societies could face censorship'.<sup>23</sup>

The cultural aversion towards the Christian faith (as noted above) corresponds with Gudrun Kugler's deep concern (as referred to at the outset of this chapter) that forms of intolerance against Christians are emerging and that negative stereotyping of Christians is an issue. This is in line with the following significant observations by Os Guinness:

We are seeing a series of mounting violations of religious freedom in the West – health care mandates that violate conscience, de-recognition of Christian groups that refuse to allow 'all-comers' in their leadership, and the threat to cut the funding for religious groups that cannot agree with the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) agenda when dealing with relief and development around the world. Many of these are unwitting violations of

<sup>19</sup> Lars Dahle, 'Encountering and Engaging a Post-modern Context: Applying the Apologetic Model in Acts 17', in *Whitefield Briefing* (December 2002) 7.6, 2: <http://klice.co.uk/uploads/whitfield/Vol%207.6%20Dahle.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> On 'the closing of the university mind', see Guinness, *The Global Public Square*, 99-105.

<sup>21</sup> For some impressions from one such missional initiative, see <http://ifesworld.org/en/blog/2014/03/feuer-fire-europe-responds-gospel>

<sup>22</sup> The evangelical student movement UCCF voiced deep concerns in relation to the proposed anti-terror Bill: <https://www.uccf.org.uk/news/potential-threat-to-freedom-of-speech-in-university-cus.htm>

<sup>23</sup> [www.christian.org.uk/news/govt-climbdown-after-cu-free-speech-concerns](http://www.christian.org.uk/news/govt-climbdown-after-cu-free-speech-concerns). It should be noticed that the public debate in the UK also included an open letter from 500 university professors: [www.theguardian.com/education/2015/feb/02/counter-terrorism-security-bill-threat-freedom-of-speech-universities](http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/feb/02/counter-terrorism-security-bill-threat-freedom-of-speech-universities)

religious freedom by liberals in the name of equality and other noble intentions.<sup>24</sup>

A number of these attempts to marginalise Christians are in fact intentional. Various lobbying groups – claiming to represent such groups as new atheists, LGBT communities, and fundamentalist Muslim communities – clearly want to restrict Christian witness and mission to the private sphere.<sup>25</sup> Such attempts should be seen as attitudinal and cultural signs of intolerance, thus threatening and (in some contexts) reducing freedom of belief for confessional Christians in (western) Europe.

If such intolerant attitudes are established more permanently, sociologically and culturally, they will function as plausibility structures. This means that such convictions become more plausible if they are supported by sociological structures and by influential cultural and friendly voices around us. This is often the case with a secular mind-set in (western) Europe, as will become evident in the following.

### **The Plausibility Level: Less Meaningful Ideas and More Marginal Institutions**

Sociologists claimed earlier that the process of secularisation would lead to a completely secular world, where religion would disappear altogether. Even if this strong secularisation thesis is now abandoned, due to the widespread global resurgence of religion, central areas of modern society are secularised and secular outlooks on life are highly influential. The two foremost examples are western Europe and the global intellectual and cultural intelligentsia.<sup>26</sup>

In line with this revised and nuanced secularisation thesis, Os Guinness offers the following definition:

---

<sup>24</sup> David Taylor, 'The Global Charter of Conscience' [interview with Os Guinness], in *Lausanne Global Analysis*, 2.1 (January 2013): [www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2013-01/the-global-charter-of-conscience](http://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2013-01/the-global-charter-of-conscience)

<sup>25</sup> '[We] are seeing an unwitting convergence between some very different Western trends that together form a perfect storm. One trend is the general disdain for religion that leads to a discounting of religious freedom, sharpened by a newly aggressive atheism and a heavy-handed separationism that both call for the exclusion of religion from public life. Another is the over-zealous attempt of certain activists of the sexual revolution to treat freedom of religion and belief as an obstruction to their own rights that must be dismantled for ever. Yet another is the sometimes blatant, sometimes subtle, initiatives of certain advocates of Islam to press their own claims in ways that contradict freedom of religion and belief, and freedom of speech as it has been classically understood' (Guinness, *The Global Public Square*, 17).

<sup>26</sup> For an accessible summary of the extensive secularization debate, see Albert Mohler's interview with Peter Berger: [www.albertmohler.com/2010/10/11/rethinking-secularization-a-conversation-with-peter-berger-2](http://www.albertmohler.com/2010/10/11/rethinking-secularization-a-conversation-with-peter-berger-2)

*By secularization I mean the process through which, starting from the center and moving outwards, successive sectors of society and culture have been freed from the decisive influence of religious ideas and institutions. In other words, secularization is the process by which we have neutralized the social and cultural significance of religion in the central areas of modern society, such as the worlds of science, economics, technology, bureaucracy, and so on, making religious ideas less meaningful and religious institutions more marginal.*<sup>27</sup>

This secular context has immense implications for how Christian mission and witness are being practised in the western European context, both related to Christian ideas becoming less meaningful and Christian institutions becoming more marginal.

First, since *Christian ideas are seen as less meaningful* by many western Europeans today, authentic and relevant Christian mission in this context has become a highly challenging task, especially in terms of the public and interpersonal communication of the Christian faith. This includes the following common challenges in today's Europe:

1. Christian ideas and images are often viewed through the cultural lenses of post-Christendom, i.e. through stories of mythical and factual abuses of power by churches and Christians throughout history
2. Biblical realities, concepts and images – such as God, Father, holiness, sin, love, salvation, cross, freedom, and Jesus Christ – are not defined through the lenses of classical Christianity, also due to the loss of any given, traditional authority.
3. The wider cultural milieu is a context where the Gospel is not usually seen or heard as a viable and relevant option, either in terms of reason (arguments) or in terms of imagination (stories).

This challenging situation may lead to Christian self-censorship and retreat into the private sphere, thus creating an impression that the Christian faith is personally unengaging and socially irrelevant. This is clearly self-destructive for authentic Christian mission, and needs to be countered with a holistic missional approach, safeguarding both the integrity of the message and the messenger.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, widespread ignorance about the Bible and the Christian faith may increasingly open up the way for a new and honest curiosity, generating public and private discussions, conversations, and explorations.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Os Guinness, *The Last Christian on Earth: Uncover the Enemy's Plot to Undermine the Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010), 57.

<sup>28</sup> See Lars Dahle, 'Mission in 3D: A Key Lausanne III Theme', in Margunn S. Dahle, Lars Dahle and Knud Jørgensen (eds), *The Lausanne Movement: A Range of Perspectives* (Oxford: Regnum, 2014), 265-79.

<sup>29</sup> See Lars Dahle, 'Truth, Christian Mission and Apologetics: A Response and A Proposal', in *Norwegian Journal of Missiology* (2013) 67.1, 21-38.

Secondly, the fact that *Christian institutions are more marginal* in contemporary western European societies has created an ambivalent context for Christian mission. This is especially true in terms of the church and its public engagement and witness, which include the following common challenges in today's western Europe:<sup>30</sup>

1. Established churches with a traditionally strong and close relationship with the state (such as in the UK, the Netherlands, Germany and Scandinavia) are seen as a 'public utility' and as 'vicarious religion'.
2. Churches are often considered to be ancient and archaic, and thus being culturally and socially irrelevant. This is reinforced by the historic and more recent takeover of a number of church-owned institutions by government agencies, especially in the fields of education and *diakonia*.<sup>31</sup>
3. The fact that Christian institutions are more marginal results in less public respect for their institutional convictions and integrity. Increasingly, Christian organisations and institutions are challenged (whether by secular peers, mainstream media or government agencies), in areas such as institutional beliefs and values, employment policies, and sexual tolerance.
4. The fact that Christian institutions are more marginal also reinforces the increasing individual tendency of 'believing without belonging', since Christian churches (and other institutions) often are seen as irrelevant and unengaging.

Again, such challenges may lead to Christian self-censorship and to even further retreat into the private sphere, thus reinforcing the social and cultural irrelevance of many churches in western Europe. In view of the global nature of the Christian church, as well as the increasingly global nature of secular modernity, this leads at the missional level to the following question: 'Can Christians from both the West and the global South so recover the integrity and effectiveness of faith that together we prevail against the challenges of modernity?'<sup>32</sup>

At the public level, all this raises the issue of how to live together in a secular and pluralistic society across deep differences, with a mutual respect for freedom of belief. Historically, Europe was characterised by 'a

Copyrighted Material

<sup>30</sup> See Jeff Fountain, 'Europe: A Most Strategic Mission Field'; Rick Wade, 'Guest Editorial: Part 1: Secularization and the Church in Europe', in *Christian Education Journal* (Supplemental Issue, Fall, 2013), 80-84; and Os Guinness, *Renaissance. The Power of the Gospel However Dark the Times* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014).

<sup>31</sup> The opposite tendency (i.e. starting new Christian schools) is also evident in some contexts (e.g. in Norway). This may be viewed *either* as openness to faith initiatives in a given context (with wider cultural potential) or as a marginalised faith initiative within the faith community.

<sup>32</sup> Os Guinness, *Renaissance*, 48.

sacred public sphere', where Christian churches were given preferred, established or monopolistic positions in public life at the expense of everything else. Increasingly, the contemporary situation in western Europe is characterised by the opposite, i.e. 'a naked public sphere' where religions and religious expressions are being excluded from public life. For the upholding of freedom of belief and for the promotion of authentic Christian mission, neither model is preferable.

Therefore, the alternative model of 'a civil public square' was recently proposed as a third way in *The Global Charter of Conscience*. It was launched by an international group of academics and activists in Brussels in June 2012.<sup>33</sup> In line with the concept of 'reasonable accommodation', the charter defines the notion of 'a civil public square' in Article 16:

The public place of freedom of conscience in a world of deep diversity is best fulfilled through the vision of a cosmopolitan and civil public square – a public square in which people of all faiths, religious and naturalistic, are free to enter and engage public life on the basis of their faith, but always within a double framework: first, under the rule of law that respects all human rights, freedom of conscience in particular, and makes no distinction between peoples based on their beliefs; and second, according to a freely agreed covenant specifying what each person understands to be just and free for everyone else too, and therefore of the duties involved in living with the deep differences of others.<sup>34</sup>

This is arguably the most developed and attractive notion of the public square for a deeply secular and pluralistic context such as western Europe, with an appropriate framework both for safeguarding freedom of belief, thought and conscience, and for entering and engaging public life on the basis of fundamental faith commitments. If this charter were to be implemented in Europe at large, the freedom of authentic Christian witness and mission would be strengthened at the public level. This would also lead to the challenging – and even changing – of fundamental plausibility structures.

### **The Credibility Level: The Challenges to Freedom of Belief from Secular Worldviews**

As indicated at the outset of this chapter, western Europe has some unique missional features.

This includes the historic observation that most – if not all – secular worldviews originated within western Europe, and the current observation

---

<sup>33</sup> See Ghiletschi, *Report to the Committee*, 11-12; David Taylor, 'The Global Charter of Conscience'; Os Guinness, *The Global Public Square*, 213-27; and <http://charterofconscience.org>. It should be noted that Os Guinness was the major author of the charter.

<sup>34</sup> The charter is published at <http://charterofconscience.org> and in Os Guinness, *The Global Public Square*, 215-27.

that Europe is the leading educator of the rest of the world.<sup>35</sup> Thus, a secular western European mind-set is becoming highly influential globally.

However, in relation to the issue of freedom of belief, secular worldviews only become a challenge for Christian mission if they are totalitarian in their claims, as noted in *The Cape Town Commitment* (CTC):

Most [religions / worldviews] will seek to respect competing truth claims of other faiths and live alongside them. However post-modern, relativist pluralism is different. Its ideology allows for no absolute or universal truth. While tolerating truth claims, it views them as no more than cultural constructs... Such pluralism asserts 'tolerance' as an ultimate value, but it can take oppressive forms in countries where secularism or aggressive atheism govern the public arena.<sup>36</sup>

This latter observation points to a challenging tendency in a number of western European countries, especially evident in arenas such as the universities, the mainstream media, the law courts, and the workplace in general.<sup>37</sup>

Current secular worldviews with totalitarian claims in Europe include both modern versions (such as the new atheism<sup>38</sup>) and post-modern versions (such as post-modern relativist pluralism). An appropriate missional engagement with such totalitarian worldviews has to integrate robust apologetics, *whether* for those 'who can engage at the highest intellectual and public level' *or* for all believers when relating 'the truth with prophetic relevance to everyday public conversation'.<sup>39</sup>

### Concluding Reflections on Implications for Christian Mission

The discussion above has shown that, in terms of freedom of belief, Christian witness and mission in (western) Europe take place in an ambivalent and challenging secular and pluralistic context.

In view of the above, I conclude with the following reflections on missional implications:

<sup>35</sup> See Jeff Fountain, 'Europe: A Most Strategic Mission Field', and Greg Pritchard, 'A Global Vision of the Gospel: Why Europe is Strategically Important II', in *Evangelical Focus*, 28th January 2015, at: <http://evangelicalfocus.com>

<sup>36</sup> CTC, II.A.1, published at: [www.lausanne.org](http://www.lausanne.org)

<sup>37</sup> As expressed in The Cape Town Commitment: 'The interlocking arenas of Government, Business and Academia have a strong influence on the values of each nation and, in human terms, define the freedom of the Church.' (CTC, II.A.7 'Truth and the public arenas'). Unfortunately, CTC II.A.7 leaves out the mainstream media; see Dahle, 'Media Messages Matter: Towards a New Missiological Approach to the Media', in *Norwegian Journal of Missiology* (June 2014), 105-21.

<sup>38</sup> The new atheism claims that religion in general, and Christian faith specifically, is not only intellectually wrong but is also morally wrong and dangerous. See e.g. Alister E. McGrath, *Why God won't go away: Engaging the New Atheism* (London: SPCK, 2011).

<sup>39</sup> CTC II.A.2; see also Lars Dahle, 'Truth, Christian Mission and Apologetics'.



1. It seems that every Christian church in (western) Europe is being challenged by secular mind-sets and worldviews. However, the actual responses from churches may vary across a spectrum from cultural assimilation, through cultural engagement, to cultural escape.<sup>40</sup>
2. At all four levels described above, it is primarily the public exercise, propagation and defence of Christian beliefs that is being challenged in Europe through secularisation.
3. Such public pressures in Europe may lead to a compromise both of the integrity of Christian beliefs, the integrity of Christian institutions and organisations, and the integrity of Christian believers, thus threatening the essential practice of holistic mission.
4. Christians of various theological persuasions and missional traditions in Europe need to engage together constructively in the common social and cultural shaping of a global civil public square.<sup>41</sup> This includes making an essential contribution to a richer pluralism in the wider European society, hopefully through an authentic Christian witness.<sup>42</sup>
5. Finally, authentic Christian mission in this challenging secular context needs to recover – or discover – ‘mission in 3D’. This is the urgent calling ‘to bear witness to Jesus Christ and all his teaching – in every nation, in every sphere of society, and in the realm of ideas’.<sup>43</sup>

Copyrighted Material

<sup>40</sup> It seems plausible to assume that historic and established churches have a tendency to move towards cultural assimilation, whereas non-established, non-traditional and migrant churches usually would move towards cultural escape.

<sup>41</sup> In order to advance a civil public square, we should (a) affirm and expect *transparency* (regarding fundamental faith / worldview commitments), (b) expect and respect *transposition* (with appropriate arguments for the different arenas), and (c) expect and facilitate *translation* (due to the lack of knowledge of faith traditions and terminologies).

<sup>42</sup> This is in accord with the recommendations in the January 2015 PACE resolution (see the Appendix below).

<sup>43</sup> See Lars Dahle, ‘Mission in 3D’.

## Appendix

### PACE Resolution 2136 (2015)<sup>44</sup>

#### **Tackling Intolerance and Discrimination in Europe with a Special Focus on Christians**

1. Intolerance and discrimination on grounds of religion or belief affect minority religious groups in Europe, but also people belonging to majority religious groups. Numerous acts of hostility, violence and vandalism have been recorded in recent years against Christians and their places of worship, but these acts are often overlooked by the national authorities. Expression of faith is sometimes unduly limited by national legislation and policies which do not allow the accommodation of religious beliefs and practices.
2. The reasonable accommodation of religious beliefs and practices constitutes a pragmatic means of ensuring the effective and full enjoyment of freedom of religion. When it is applied in a spirit of tolerance, reasonable accommodation allows all religious groups to live in harmony in the respect and acceptance of their diversity.
3. The Parliamentary Assembly has recalled on several occasions the need to promote the peaceful co-existence of religious communities in the member-states, notably in *Resolution 1846 (2011)* on combating all forms of discrimination based on religion, *Recommandation 1962 (2011)* on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue and *Resolution 1928 (2013)* on safeguarding human rights in relation to religion and belief, and protecting religious communities from violence.
4. Freedom of thought, conscience and religion is protected by Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and considered as one of the foundations of a democratic and pluralist society. Limitations to the exercise of freedom of religion must be restricted to those prescribed by law and necessary in a democratic society.
5. The Assembly is convinced that measures should be taken to ensure the effective enjoyment of the protection of freedom of religion or belief afforded to every individual in Europe.
6. The Assembly therefore calls on the Council of Europe member-states to:
  - 6.1. promote a culture of tolerance and ‘living together’ based on the acceptance of religious pluralism and on the contribution of religions to a

---

<sup>44</sup> Resolution adopted by The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) on 29th Jan 2015 (Eighth Sitting), see *Doc. 13660*: <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=21549&lang=en>

democratic and pluralist society, but also on the right of individuals not to adhere to any religion;

6.2. promote reasonable accommodation within the principle of indirect discrimination so as to:

6.2.1. ensure that the right of all individuals under their jurisdiction to freedom of religion and belief is respected, without impairing for anyone the other rights also guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights;

6.2.2. uphold freedom of conscience in the workplace while ensuring that access to services provided by law is maintained and the right of others to be free from discrimination is protected;

6.2.3. respect the right of parents to provide their children with an education in conformity with their religious or philosophical convictions, while guaranteeing the fundamental right of children to education in a critical and pluralistic manner in accordance with the European Convention on Human Rights, its protocols and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights;

6.2.4. enable Christians to fully participate in public life;

6.3. protect the peaceful exercise of freedom of assembly, in particular through measures to ensure that counter-demonstrations do not affect the right to demonstrate, in line with the guidelines on freedom of assembly, of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR);

6.4. uphold the fundamental right to freedom of expression by ensuring national legislation does not unduly limit religiously motivated speech;

6.5. publicly condemn the use of and incitement to violence, as well as all forms of discrimination and intolerance on religious grounds;

6.6. combat and prevent cases of violence, discrimination and intolerance, in particular by carrying out effective investigations in order to avoid any sense of impunity among the perpetrators;

6.7. encourage the media to avoid negative stereotyping and communicating prejudices against Christians, in the same way as for any other group;

6.8. ensure the protection of Christian minority communities and allow such communities to be registered as a religious organisation, and to establish and maintain meeting places and places of worship, regardless of the number of believers and without any undue administrative burden;

6.9. guarantee the enjoyment by Christian minority communities of the right to publish and use religious literature.

# **RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN BRAZIL AND LATIN AMERICA**

**Felipe Augusto Lopes Carvalho  
and Uziel Santana dos Santos**

## **Introduction and Initial Concepts**

Religious Freedom is described by most contemporary constitutions as a fundamental human right, part of the 'inherent dignity of all members of the human family', and enshrined in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789) as a natural, inalienable and sacred right, as a foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

It is the first and most fundamental human right, deemed so precious that the American Founding Fathers enshrined it in the US Constitution. Scholars of political science and constitutionalists even claim that, without religious freedom in all its dimensions, there is no full civil liberty or full political freedom – in other words, there is no possibility of democracy. Moreover, the struggle for religious freedom is fundamental for the other human rights.

Looking at the protection of religious freedom in international law, the quantity of documents dealing with the right to religious freedom demonstrates the importance of freedom of thought, conscience and religion for the international community. Thus it is useful to examine how religious freedom is assured and interpreted in the United Nations system of human rights protection. In this system, we highlight some declarations and treaties that regulate religious freedom, among which are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (1966), the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion or Belief (1981), and the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

Religious freedom is, generically, the possibility of the individual being able to adopt for himself a particular religious choice, to change his religion, and even to choose not to adopt any religion, and the possibility of expressing his thoughts, individually or collectively, without fear of suffering discrimination by the political community or other religious groups. Traditionally, there are three forms of expression of religious freedom: a) freedom of belief; b) freedom of worship; c) freedom of religious organisation. Religious freedom can be enjoyed only when these

three basic forms of expression are properly linked and the rights that follow on from these are equally well protected and enjoyed by all religious groups without discrimination.

Despite it being a fundamental human right, there are serious violations against religious freedom, especially in countries where religious persecution results in countless individuals that are tortured and killed, and otherwise prevented from freely practising their religion and their liturgies.

In the next part of this paper, we analyse the right to religious freedom in certain countries of Latin America, specifically Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Peru and Cuba, presenting some cases of violation of this right, aiming to promote dialogue with governments and to increase the protection of religious freedom around Latin America.

Before that, however, it's important to distinguish two concepts of violence that are essential to an understanding of whether we talk about violations of the right to religious freedom in Latin America. It is a distinction based on the theory of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and German legal doctrine, between violations of religious freedom by 'real violence' or 'symbolic violence'.

### **Real Violence versus Symbolic Violence**

In the current context of religious persecution, especially in the Middle East and Africa, there has been a real genocide of Christians. Physical violence – we call it 'real violence' – is notorious and constant. The actions of Islamic terrorist groups such as ISIS – Syria, Iraq and Libya – Boko Haram (Nigeria), and Al-Shabaab (Kenya), occur with the use of physical violence and lethal weapons, with physical consequences, often leading to their victims' death. From the point of view of criminal law, it is a violence that restricts certain fundamental freedoms of individuals and, therefore, it is not just a mere threat or presumed violence. Rather, it is a violence that is actually experienced and that results in the injury or death of its victims. This is the kind of violence that has been leading to the genocide against Christians reported by NGOs and country reports from England, Germany, Australia, USA, France and the United Nations.<sup>1</sup>

Copyrighted Material

<sup>1</sup> In this regard, the Human Rights and Democracy Report 2013 by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of UK government sets out the analysis on country situations about religious persecution. According to the Report, freedom of religion or belief remains under threat. A key concern has been the closing space for Christians, in particular in the Middle East and North Africa region, the very region where their faith was born. But there has also been a rising tide of violence and intimidation in traditionally Christian countries in Africa. Overall, harassment or intimidation of specific religious groups are at a six-year high, and there is no sign of the climate improving. 74% of people live in countries where high levels of religious hostility limit religious freedom, and 64% in countries where government restrictions are the limiting factor. 'We have seen more turbulence in the Middle

In other places, like in Latin America, symbolic violence occurs, analysed by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron in *La reproduction: Éléments d'une théorie du système d'enseignement* (1970). For them, symbolic violence is the process by which the class that dominates imposes its culture on the dominated. The symbolic system of a particular culture is a social construction, and maintenance is essential to the perpetuation of a particular society through culture internalisation by all members of society. Symbolic violence is expressed by imposing 'legitimate' and disguised constraints, with the internalisation of the dominant culture. The subdued is not opposed to his oppressor, as he/she is not perceived as a victim of this process: on the contrary, the oppressed considers it a natural and inevitable situation.<sup>2</sup> Transposing these concepts to the right of religious freedom, what happens is that governments and dominant social movements, even those grounded in constitutional theory, are labelling everyone who thinks differently from them – the secularist worldview – as 'fundamentalists'. This is symbolic violence.

As shown in the following examples, in some countries there may be no real violence but symbolic violence does exist.

### Brazil

Religious Freedom is described by the Brazilian Constitution as a fundamental human right that must be protected as part of the dignity of the human person. According to the Constitution, freedom of conscience and belief is inviolable, the free exercise of religious cults is ensured and, under the terms of the law, the protection of places of worship and their rites are guaranteed. Moreover, the rendering of religious assistance in civil and military establishments of collective confinement is ensured.<sup>3</sup>

Here is a summary of constitutional protection in the matter of religious freedom:<sup>4</sup>

---

East, with Egypt suffering particular upheaval. South Sudan and Ukraine also stand out as examples of countries where the path to full democracy continues to be difficult. Most tragically of all, we will soon mark the third anniversary of conflict in Syria. A regime that claims to be fighting terrorism is terrorising its own people, using starvation and hunger as weapons of war,' said the Foreign Secretary William Hague. The Report is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2013/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2013>

<sup>2</sup> Nadime l'Apicciarella, *O Papel da Educação na Legitimação da Violência Simbólica* (2003), 1. Available at: [www.cdcc.sc.usp.br/ciencia/artigos/art\\_20/violenciasimbolo.html](http://www.cdcc.sc.usp.br/ciencia/artigos/art_20/violenciasimbolo.html)

<sup>3</sup> Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> Ferreira Luiz Pinto, *Manual de Direito Constitucional* (Rio de Janeiro: Forense, 1992).

1. The Constitution is not atheist; it invokes God's protection in the Preamble.
2. It accepts as absolute the freedom of belief.
3. It enshrines the separation of church and state.
4. It supports, however, the 'collaboration of public interest'.
5. It allows for 'conscientious objection'.
6. It ensures freedom of worship.
7. It ensures the 'protection of places of worship and liturgies'.
8. It benefits the churches, assuring them of immunity from taxes on their 'temples'.

The Pew Forum's Global Restrictions on Religion report describes Brazil as having the lowest combination of government restrictions and social hostilities among the 25 most populous countries in the world. There is no formal persecution or 'real violence' against religious groups in Brazil, but there are several violations involving 'symbolic violence', a veiled persecution against religious beliefs and communities, which denotes a form of violence operating symbolically, exercised upon a social agent, even with his or her complicity.

There are several examples of this 'symbolic violence' in Brazil, e.g. the attempts to prohibit missionaries from preaching to indigenous groups. In 2014 the official indigenous agency of Brazilian government, the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) approved a document prohibiting any religious proselytising activity directed to indigenous groups: 'Users are prohibited from exercising any religious activities with indigenous peoples, such as hymns and religious songs, collective prayers, translation of the Bible, songs and prayers, and the use of clothing with pictures or religious expressions'. This document is justified by the excuse that the government is protecting their culture. However, it represents a violation of religious freedom. The document violates the right of non-indigenous people to engage in religious proselytism.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the document violates the universal right to change one's religion or beliefs, protected by the Constitution and international law, and applied also to indigenous people. Not respecting this right is to limit the basic dimension of human autonomy.<sup>6</sup> Thus, in modern secular liberal constitutionalism, this document is considered aberrant because an institution, even when it represents the interests of a community, cannot impose such restriction on

---

<sup>5</sup> ANAJURE – National Association of Evangelical Jurists in Brazil. ANAJURE and evangelical agencies have published a notice about the Christian role of cross-cultural missions in Brazilian indigenous lands and the obstacles created by the government:

[www.anajure.org.br/anajure-e-agencias-evangelicas-emitem-nota-publica-sobre-a-atuacao-crista-de-missoes-transculturais-em-terras-indigenas-brasileiras-e-os-obstaculos-criados-pelo-governo-federal](http://www.anajure.org.br/anajure-e-agencias-evangelicas-emitem-nota-publica-sobre-a-atuacao-crista-de-missoes-transculturais-em-terras-indigenas-brasileiras-e-os-obstaculos-criados-pelo-governo-federal)

<sup>6</sup> ANAJURE – National Association of Evangelical Jurists in Brazil, *The right to religious freedom in Brazil and in the world* (ANAJURE Publicações, 2014).

this freedom that every indigenous person holds, personally and individually.

Other cases of symbolic violence are found in the field of education. Universities, schools, churches, families and the parents of students are repeatedly rising up against authoritarian 'waves' in Brazil that aim at the deconstruction of Christian values in Brazilian society. One example was the attempt to insert into the National Education Plan an exacerbated ideology and partisanship of the human rights discourse in the educational environment, as if only racial discrimination (black and white), sex (male and female) and behavioural (heterosexual and homosexual) were present among us. The educational system should not be a stage for the promotion of a culture of struggles, but for diversity, harmony, tolerance, respect for family law and social peace, without ignoring or trying to deconstruct the historic values of the Brazilian nation that is eminently Christian.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, it is not acceptable to create booklets of sex education that include contents in textbooks of the National Education System that lead to an early sexualisation of children, as well as clear advocacy and promotion of homosexual behaviour.<sup>8</sup>

Although Brazil is a secular state and proclaims the separation of church and state, some groups and politicians misinterpret it, leading the government to an increasing ban of religious expression in the public arena, contrary to the Brazilian Constitution. The Brazilian secular state is characterised by benevolent neutrality or non-hostile separation between state and religion. In fact, the state strives to maximise the religious arena. That's the reason why the Constitution allows collaboration between religious organisations and the government in the public interest.

Despite violations of religious freedom, there are some instruments aiming to promote and defend religious freedom in Brazil. Brazil recently joined the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPP-Brazil), which brings together parliamentarians from around the world to discuss the issue. IPP-Brazil is a result of the partnership between the National Association of Evangelical Jurists and the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).<sup>9</sup>

Copyrighted Material

<sup>7</sup> The National Education Plan on the agenda and Commission shall approve base text: [www.anajure.org.br/plano-nacional-da-educacao-entra-em-pauta-e-comissao-aprova-texto-base](http://www.anajure.org.br/plano-nacional-da-educacao-entra-em-pauta-e-comissao-aprova-texto-base) (2014).

<sup>8</sup> ANAJURE and organisations representing Christian universities and schools in Brazil have published a Note on the National Education Plan that is under discussion in the Senate: [www.anajure.org.br/anajure-e-entidades-representativas-de-universidades-e-escolas-cristas-do-brasil-emitem-nota-conjunta-sobre-plano-nacional-da-educacao-que-esta-em-discussao-no-senado-federal](http://www.anajure.org.br/anajure-e-entidades-representativas-de-universidades-e-escolas-cristas-do-brasil-emitem-nota-conjunta-sobre-plano-nacional-da-educacao-que-esta-em-discussao-no-senado-federal) (2014).

<sup>9</sup> ANAJURE presents a summary of its shares in 2014 and announces 2015 schedule: [www.anajure.org.br/anajure-apresenta-resumo-de-suas-acoes-em-2014-e-anuncia-agenda-de-2015](http://www.anajure.org.br/anajure-apresenta-resumo-de-suas-acoes-em-2014-e-anuncia-agenda-de-2015) (2014).



Moreover, in March 2015 the Parliamentary Front for Refugees and Humanitarian Aid (FPMRAH) was created with the main objective of providing humanitarian aid to people and communities in vulnerable situations, and assisting the formulation of public policies for the protection of and support for refugees. The Front will be concerned especially with cases of religious persecution in Brazil and throughout the world.<sup>10</sup> The Front is made up of 213 parliamentarians from the Chamber of Deputies and Federal Senate, as well as representatives of civic society, as in ANAJURE and authorities from countries where Brazil maintains diplomatic relations.<sup>11</sup>

Brazilian Congressmen, supported by IPP-Brazil, recently presented the 'Religious Freedom Law' to Parliament. This Bill aims to establish several rights and duties that actively support and strengthen the constitutional right to religious freedom in Brazil.<sup>12</sup> The Bill is being discussed and waiting for approval.

There should be a joint effort between the government and civic society to eradicate any form of violation, whether real or symbolic, against the right to freedom of belief, worship and religious organisation in Brazil, aiming at the peaceful and harmonious co-existence of the various groups and religious organisations without the interference of the state.

### **Colombia**

Colombia's 1991 Constitution and laws provide for full freedom of religious expression and practice and also provides for the equality of all religions under the law. Article 19 specifically guarantees religious freedom, stating 'Every individual has the right to freely profess his/her religion and to disseminate it individually or collectively'. The Colombian Constitution also protects against discrimination on the basis of religious

---

<sup>10</sup> Religious persecution cases will be discussed on a new Front for policies for refugees: [www2.camara.leg.br/camaranoticias/radio/materias/radioagencia/483733-casos-de-perseguiçao-religiosa-serao-foco-de-nova-frente-sobre-politicas-para-refugiados.html](http://www2.camara.leg.br/camaranoticias/radio/materias/radioagencia/483733-casos-de-perseguiçao-religiosa-serao-foco-de-nova-frente-sobre-politicas-para-refugiados.html) (2015).

<sup>11</sup> Creation of the IPP/Brazil and FPMRAH: [www.anajure.org.br/estao-lancados-oficialmente-o-painel-internacional-de-parlamentares-para-a-liberdade-religiosa-ippbrasil-e-a-frente-parlamentar-mista-para-refugiados-e-ajuda-humanitaria-fpmrah](http://www.anajure.org.br/estao-lancados-oficialmente-o-painel-internacional-de-parlamentares-para-a-liberdade-religiosa-ippbrasil-e-a-frente-parlamentar-mista-para-refugiados-e-ajuda-humanitaria-fpmrah) (2014).

<sup>12</sup> ANAJURE closes International Congress on Superior Tribunal de Justica (STJ), launching the Religious Freedom Law, and confirming the third edition in 2016 with professors from Coimbra, Oxford and Harvard: [www.anajure.org.br/anajure-encerra-congresso-internacional-no-stj-lancando-o-estatuto-juridico-da-liberdade-religiosa-e-confirmando-a-3a-edicao-em-2016-com-professores-de-coimbra-oxford-e-harvard](http://www.anajure.org.br/anajure-encerra-congresso-internacional-no-stj-lancando-o-estatuto-juridico-da-liberdade-religiosa-e-confirmando-a-3a-edicao-em-2016-com-professores-de-coimbra-oxford-e-harvard) (2015).

belief or practice, grants freedom of worship and missionary activity, and recognises religious education and marriage.<sup>13</sup>

However, some obstacles prevent the full exercise of these constitutional guarantees, and a significant percentage of the population is subjected to consistent and serious violations of their religious freedom. According to the local newspaper *El Tiempo*, 80% of the Colombian population is Catholic, while 13.5% are Protestant, 2% agnostic and the remaining 4.5% belong to Judaism, Islam and various traditional belief systems.

The Constitution formally distinguishes between church and state, but the Catholic Church often enjoys preferential treatment due to its historical importance and dominant presence in Colombian society. For example, the law restricts the ability to perform civil marriages to members of the Catholic Church and the thirteen churches which have signed the 1997 agreement. Protestant leaders have reported that local authorities are often unwilling to provide legal recognition to marriages performed by Protestant churches.

Preferential treatment of the Roman Catholic Church, especially in matters of institutional ministry, taxation and education, violates Colombia's claim that all religions are equal under the law. Although religious institutions are exempt from taxation under Colombian law, non-Catholic groups have been charged property and other taxes by local governments.

One of the most significant challenges to the exercise of religious freedom in Colombia derives from the long-lasting, three-sided domestic conflict between the Colombian government, leftist guerrillas, and paramilitary forces. Clergy operating in the countryside are particularly affected by the violence as armed militia groups, such as FARC and the National Liberation Army, have targeted religious figures and have threatened social stability in Colombia.<sup>14</sup>

Christians pay a high price for actions rooted in their faith. Christian adults and youths who refuse to join illegal armed groups for reasons of conscience, and converts to Christianity who wish to leave the armed groups, must go into hiding or be killed. Christian families and communities who resist the armed groups' demands, finding them incompatible with their faith, often face horrific and inhumane consequences. The majority of victims come from already historically marginalised communities with little public voice; a significant percentage

---

<sup>13</sup> Institute on Religion and Public Policy Report, *Religious Freedom in the Republic of Colombia*: [www.justice.gov/eoir/vll/country/Religion\\_Public\\_policy/Colombia%20Immigration%20Report.pdf](http://www.justice.gov/eoir/vll/country/Religion_Public_policy/Colombia%20Immigration%20Report.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, *Religious Freedom in Colombia*:

<http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/religious-freedom-in-colombia>

are *campesinos*, small-scale subsistence farmers, living in rural parts of the country, and many are from Afro-Colombian or indigenous communities.<sup>15</sup>

Across the country, an estimated 200 churches are believed to have been forcibly closed. In some regions, religious activity has been forbidden by the armed groups. Entire Christian communities have been displaced, and pastors and church leaders have been marked out for assassination. In many cases these threats have been carried out.

One of these groups outside the law recently threatened five Christian leaders because of their ministry with victims of violence and their participation in the process of peace and reconciliation. A joint statement was written by the Anglican Church in the Caribbean, the Presbytery Coast (Presbyterian Church of Colombia), the Mennonite Church in Barranquilla, and the organisation Peace and Justice of Colombia, declaring: 'We believe these threats are expressions of religious persecution, since they are clearly threatening the development and free exercise of our pastoral and humanitarian work with the victims of armed conflict, and of our participation in the peace process of Colombia as the Gospel requires us.'

After this incident, the FIAJC – *Federacion Interamericana De Juristas Cristianos*<sup>16</sup> – wrote a letter to the President of Colombia,<sup>17</sup> asking the government to offer immediate and appropriate protection to those threatened, and that urgent measures be taken to conduct a thorough investigation to find those responsible and put them at the disposal of Colombian justice.

The complexity of the internal conflict coupled with an overwhelmingly disastrous human rights situation have contributed to a lack of awareness regarding the precise impact of the conflict on communities of faith. The situation has been compounded by reluctance among affected communities to speak out about the abuses they suffer because of a fear of retaliation by the armed groups.<sup>18</sup>

The danger of violence towards religious groups and leaders is a matter of serious concern for religious liberty. The Colombian government must strive to eliminate such violence and protect the right of religious expression.

Copyrighted Material

<sup>15</sup> Christian Solidarity Worldwide, *Colombia: Summary of Concerns and Recommendations* (June 2011): [www.csw.org.uk](http://www.csw.org.uk)

<sup>16</sup> For more information about FIJAC see [www.fiajc.org](http://www.fiajc.org)

<sup>17</sup> FIAJC – *Federacion Interamericana de Juristas Cristianos*. FIAJC sends letter to President of Colombia in defence of religious freedom in the country: [www.anajure.org.br/fiajc-emite-carta-ao-presidente-da-colombia-em-defesa-da-liberdade-religiosa-no-pais](http://www.anajure.org.br/fiajc-emite-carta-ao-presidente-da-colombia-em-defesa-da-liberdade-religiosa-no-pais)

<sup>18</sup> Christian Solidarity Worldwide, *Colombia: Religious Liberty*: [www.csw.org.uk](http://www.csw.org.uk)

## Mexico

The Mexican Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and belief to all its citizens, stating that all persons are free to profess their chosen religious belief and to engage in ceremonies and acts of worship. Congress may not enact laws that establish or prohibit any religion. The Constitution also provides for the separation of church and state. Moreover, Mexico is party to a number of international agreements including the San Jose Pact, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

However, in practice, religious liberty violations are a relatively common occurrence, especially in certain regions.<sup>19</sup> According to the National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH), the number of religious freedom violations has risen significantly in recent years. Studies by the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination (CONAPRED) show that religious discrimination remains a serious and pervasive problem in many parts of the country, with the potential to worsen in the face of government inaction. The government's adherence to an extremely strict interpretation of the concept of the separation of church and state has at times led it to distance itself from anything involving religion or religious groups, to the extent of failing to protect actively the individual's right to religious freedom.<sup>20</sup>

One of the most common violations associated with attacks on freedom of religion is the cutting of basic services, including water and electricity. The vast majority of cases involving violations of religious freedom begin in this way. State government officials rarely intervene to restore access to water and electricity, although these are public services, and such situations can last for years.<sup>21</sup>

According to the 2015 Report on Freedom of Religion or Belief in Mexico by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW),<sup>22</sup> the right to worship is consistently violated. Local officials seek to bar members of minority religious group from engaging in any kind of religious activity, whether these be Sunday morning church services, Bible studies or even meetings for prayer.

A major contributor to violations of freedom of religion and belief in Mexico is the conflict between constitutional law, which guarantees religious liberty to all citizens, and the Law of Uses and Customs, a kind of local and regional autonomy, in place in parts of the country where there is

<sup>19</sup> ANAJURE, *Mexico – Emblematic Cases of Violations on Religious Freedom*: [www.anajure.org.br/mexico-casos-emblematicos-de-violacoes-a-liberdade-religiosa](http://www.anajure.org.br/mexico-casos-emblematicos-de-violacoes-a-liberdade-religiosa) (2014).

<sup>20</sup> CSW, *Mexico: Religious Freedom and Equality*: [www.csw.org.uk](http://www.csw.org.uk)

<sup>21</sup> CSW, *Mexico: Freedom of Religion or Belief* (February 2015): [www.csw.org.uk](http://www.csw.org.uk)

<sup>22</sup> CSW, *Mexico: Freedom of Religion or Belief*.

a high indigenous population. The majority of religious liberty violations tend to arise out of conflicts between traditionalist or syncretistic Roman Catholic local leaders and non-Catholics who do not wish to participate in or contribute financially to religious festivals, or who wish to practise a different faith or no faith. These abuses can range in severity from cutting off water and electricity, and preventing non-Catholic children from attending school, to beatings, forced displacement and, in the most extreme instances, murder. Local authorities often justify these abuses with the excuse that it is within their rights, under the Law of Uses and Customs, to protect their culture. There is often little response from state or federal governments, thus contributing to a culture of impunity.

Conflicts between different illegal groups involved in drugs, arms and human trafficking, and extortion rackets, have had a chilling impact on religious freedom, increasing general violence in Mexico. The illegal groups see churches as an attractive target for extortion, and church leaders as potential threats to their influence and aims.

Concerned about religious freedom in Mexico, CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said,

It is unacceptable that in a modern and diverse democracy like Mexico these types of serious religious freedom violations continue to take place on a regular basis, affecting thousands of men, women and children, with no adequate response from the Mexican government at any level.<sup>23</sup>

## Peru

In the 1980s and 1990s, Peru experienced violent internal conflict which saw over 70,000 people killed.<sup>24</sup> This included an element of religious persecution against Catholics and Protestants. Most concerns relating to violations of freedom of religion or belief stem from this violent period.<sup>25</sup> However, there have already been worrying indications that factions of the Shining Path guerrillas have regrouped and resumed activity, including the recruitment of child soldiers, in certain parts of the country.<sup>26</sup>

Peruvian democratic institutions are fragile and the government has attempted to attack civic society through legislation, and continues to employ much of the polarising rhetoric and some of the abusive strategies of the not-so-distant past. In addition, cocoa cultivation in Peru is growing so rapidly that if it continues, at this speed, there are concerns that Peru will surpass Colombia as the world's largest producer of the base material for cocaine. This can only lead to increased instability in the region, which will

<sup>23</sup> CSW, *Organizations Encourage International Pressure* (19th November 2014): [www.csw.org.uk](http://www.csw.org.uk)

<sup>24</sup> *Peru: Crushed But Not Forgotten* (1st July 2011): [www.csw.org.uk](http://www.csw.org.uk)

<sup>25</sup> *Peru: Crushed But Not Forgotten*.

<sup>26</sup> CSW, *Progress in Implementation of Recommendations* (1st August 2010): [www.csw.org.uk/2010/08/01/report/129/article.htm](http://www.csw.org.uk/2010/08/01/report/129/article.htm)

have wider implications for Latin America and the rest of the world, particularly in respect of the illegal drug trade, arms trafficking and terrorist activities.

The Constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom. Article 50 of the Constitution establishes the separation of church and state but recognises the Catholic Church's role as 'an important element in the historical, cultural, and moral development of the nation'.

In December 2011 the president signed a law whereby the state recognises an individual's fundamental right of freedom of religion, as recognised by the Constitution and international treaties that the country has ratified. This law assures that registered religious organisations enjoy many of the same tax benefits already granted to the Catholic Church. In accordance with a 1980 agreement with the Holy See, the Catholic Church receives preferential treatment in education, tax benefits, immigration of religious workers, and other areas. The law signed on 20th December codified this arrangement. Several evangelical groups did not favour this version of the law, claiming it did not address the problem of inequality and maintained preferential status for the Catholic Church. Revisions of the law's regulations in October 2011 attempted to address some of the complaints of minority religious groups, who criticised the law as maintaining preferential status for the Catholic Church.<sup>27</sup>

Catholic and non-Catholic religious charities do not pay customs duties on items purchased; however, non-Catholic groups with extensive charitable activities have goods donated from abroad taxed at commercial rates. Some non-Catholic missionary groups are discriminated by having their imported religious materials taxed whereas the Catholic Church's are not. Catholics and non-Catholics are subject to equal taxation in most activities. All are exempt from paying taxes on places of worship. Buildings, houses and other real estate owned by the Catholic Church are exempt from property taxes; other religious groups may pay property taxes on schools and clergy residences.

The July 2011 regulations required non-Catholic religious groups to re-register with the Ministry of Justice within 360 days, and required that a religious group have at least 10,000 adult members. The membership lists have to be certified by the National Elections Board. This requirement is contrary to the Constitution and international treaties on religious freedom, an obstacle to the protection of religious organisations and a violation of religious freedom.

---

<sup>27</sup> US Department of State, *2012 Report on International Religious Freedom – Peru*.

## Cuba

The 1992 Constitution abolished atheism as the state creed, declared the country to be a secular state, and provided for the separation of church and state. The Cuban Constitution guarantees religious freedom, but several restrictions on religious activity are still prevalent.

Religious life in Cuba is regulated by the Communist Party's Office of Religious Affairs (ORA), which has the power to recognise certain religious groups and permit them to build new premises while denying this right to others. By law, religious groups are required to apply to the Ministry of Justice for official recognition. The application procedure requires religious groups to identify the location of their activities and their sources of funding, and requires the Ministry to certify that the group is not 'duplicating' the activities of another recognised organisation, in which case recognition is denied. Once the Ministry of Justice grants official recognition, religious organisations have to request permission from the Office of Religious Affairs (ORA) to hold meetings in approved locations, to receive foreign visitors, and to travel abroad.<sup>28</sup> Unregistered churches can experience anything from the confiscation of property to the demolition of their church building. But even churches that are registered and legally operating can face intimidation.<sup>29</sup>

Religious leaders object to the Communist Party being given direct authority over all religious activities and businesses, rather than dealing with normal legal channels. They claim the office exists solely to monitor and restrict the activities of religious groups, including the power to approve or deny religious visits, the construction or repair of religious buildings, the ability to conduct religious services in public, and the import of religious literature. ORA has denied authorisation for a number of religious activities and has, in co-operation with other government agencies, issued fines and threats of confiscation to dozens of churches and religious organisations.

The majority of reported religious freedom violations documented by Christian Solidarity Worldwide in 2013 and in the first half of 2014 consisted of government agents preventing Cubans from exercising their right to worship. Each Sunday over the past three years, CSW has received reports that scores of women, and sometimes men and children, were detained by government agents across the island and forcibly prevented from attending Sunday morning services. The total number of individual cases numbers thousands. On one Sunday in July 2014, over 100 women were arbitrarily detained in order to prevent them from attending Sunday

<sup>28</sup> US Department of State – Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2011*.

<sup>29</sup> *Christian Today*, Religious freedom worsening in Cuba: 'There is a crackdown happening.'

morning mass. In most of these cases, the victims were Cubans considered by the government to be political dissidents.<sup>30</sup>

The government actively prevents them from participating in religious services by blocking the targeted individuals in their home (by surrounding the home with police, state security agents and government-organised mobs) or by detaining them without charge, sometimes violently, and imprisoning them for the duration of religious services.

Religious groups could be considered 'problematic' if the government fears they will call for social and political reforms. Rather than moving towards a more open society, the government under the leadership of Raul Castro still views religious organisations, and in particular their leaders, as potentially dangerous entities to be controlled as much as possible.

There are several attempts to enforce the social isolation of those who fall foul of the authorities, especially by excluding and separating them from their communities of faith. Church leaders of all Protestant denominations and Roman Catholic priests continue to report heavy pressure from government officials to expel and shun certain members of their congregations who are singled out by the authorities. Moreover, government attempts to enforce the social isolation of those they consider to be dissidents extend outside the walls of the church. Many also report that members of their congregation have been approached and pressured, sometimes under threat, to file a complaint against the church leader.<sup>31</sup>

One of the government's strategies to put pressure on religious groups has been to target the bank accounts of unco-operative churches. In 2013 the Cuban government issued a communiqué to religious groups that as of 1st January 2014, only one bank account per religious association or denomination would be permitted. Individual church accounts were to be eliminated or consolidated. As the Cuban government controls the bank which holds the accounts, this has, of course, increased the authorities' ability to pressure entire denominations to bring critical voices or church groups into line.

Another example of serious violation of religious freedom in Cuba is the use of government informants in churches, seminaries and other religious institutions which continues to be widespread and persistent. The main responsibility of the informants appears to be to monitor the activities of the church, including the content of sermons, talks and comments, and to report anything perceived as counter-revolutionary or critical of the authorities. As a result, many church leaders practise a form of self-censorship, being careful not to say anything that might possibly be construed as anti-Castro or counter-revolutionary in their sermons and teaching. In this scenario, religious leaders don't have any freedom of speech, and church members don't have any freedom of worship.

---

<sup>30</sup> CSW, *Cuba: Religious Freedom Report* (August 2014): [www.csw.org.uk](http://www.csw.org.uk)

<sup>31</sup> CSW, *Cuba: Religious Freedom Report*.



Real religious freedom can exist only if it is enjoyed by all religious groups without discrimination. Progress in religious freedom must be measured in terms of how all religious groups benefit, and should also be grounded in legal systems and protections that will uphold these rights for all without discrimination or favouritism. It is vital that the European Union and other governments around the world do not allow the Cuban government to pretend that granting limited privileges to one or two religious groups over others constitutes an improvement in religious freedom.

Among other actions, the Cuban government must safeguard the freedom of all Cubans to assemble and worship according to their professed religion; allow all religious groups to operate freely without pressure or interference from government or CCP officials; guarantee freedom for Cuban religious leaders to carry out their ministry, within and outside the church walls, without harassment, threats or government pressure; end the use of government informants in churches and seminaries; and eliminate the new restriction of one bank account per religious association, and restore the right of individual churches and other religious entities to operate their own independent bank accounts.

### **Conclusion**

Religious freedom is formally protected and guaranteed in the majority of Latin American countries. However, there are serious violations against this fundamental human right, especially on an unofficial basis, in countries where religious persecution results in countless individuals being killed, tortured and prevented from freely practising their religion.

Religious persecution is rarely associated with Brazil. Religious diversity and media have contributed to a widespread perception held both within and outside the country that religious persecution does not exist. However, there are several violations of freedom of religion or belief in Brazil involving 'symbolic violence' against religious institutions and communities. For example, when it comes to religious freedom, indigenous Brazilians do not have the same rights as the rest of the population, and some missionary groups are prevented from expressing the faith in some indigenous areas. In addition, some political groups are trying to ban religious expression from the public arena with the excuse of protecting the separation between church and state. The government and all Brazilian society must ensure and defend religious freedom in all its forms of expression, individual and collective.

In Colombia, many people suffer direct persecution because of their faith, particularly those living in conflict zones or areas controlled by illegal armed groups, but also many living in the supposed safety of major urban areas. The government must ensure the safety and physical integrity of victims and those threatened, and conduct a thorough investigation,

leading to identification of those responsible for acts of violence. In addition, the eradication of all criminal and illegal groups is necessary for peace to be real, firm and durable.

In Mexico, although the federal and state governments are usually not directly responsible for committing serious violations of religious freedom, government officials at the municipal and village level often are. The federal and state governments fail in their duty to ensure that the rights laid out in the Mexican Constitution are upheld for all its citizens and those local officials are held to account when they break the law. Separation between church and state does not exempt the state from responding effectively to breaches of its own laws, whatever the motivation behind the crime. In the same way, the right to protect one's culture cannot be used as an excuse to abuse the fundamental rights of, or to take advantage of, individual members of one's community. It is the government's obligation to ensure that its law is practised and upheld for all citizens and in every part of Mexico.<sup>32</sup>

In Peru, while religious freedom is generally upheld, there are still several outstanding cases of violations of religion or belief. The international community must look for ways to support the promotion and strengthening of democratic processes, as well as to encourage the Peruvian government to take steps toward national reconciliation. If not, and issues like corruption continue to go unaddressed, the country will be in danger of spiralling back into the same pattern of injustice and inequality that characterised its past.<sup>33</sup> In addition, religious freedom should be grounded in legal systems and protection that will uphold equal rights for all religious institutions without discrimination or favouritism.

In Cuba, continued deterioration in respect of religious freedom, even as the government continues to promote an image of respect for religious freedom, is troubling. There is constant government interference in and denial of the right to worship, resulting in social isolation and pressure on church leaders. Government policy is aimed not only at preventing individuals from being present at Sunday Mass, but is also attempting to isolate them from their community of faith. Besides that, the open and clandestine use of spies and informants in religious institutions, with the aim of controlling the danger of repressive regimes promoted by religious leaders, merely results in an intimidating atmosphere that in turn restricts the right of Cubans to worship freely, without hindrance, free from fear of the possible consequences should their sermons or prayers displease the authorities.

---

<sup>32</sup> CSW, *Mexico: Freedom of Religion or Belief*.

<sup>33</sup> CSW, *Progress in Implementation of Recommendations*.

The struggle for religious freedom in all its forms must be elevated to the status of an indispensable commitment<sup>34</sup> by all the states in Latin America.

Freedom of religion or belief increasingly represents a frontline for the promotion and protection of human rights. The international community must stand with brave leaders who defend religious freedom, and must hold Latin American countries to account for it. Respect for fundamental human rights must be part of any political dialogue and the cornerstone of any economic or political agreement.

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

Copyrighted Material

---

<sup>34</sup> ANAJURE, *The right to religious freedom in Brazil and in the world* (São Paulo, 2014).

# **SECTION FOUR**

## **MISSIOLOGICAL RESPONSES**

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

# **FREE TO BELIEVE AND TO DO MISSION WORLDWIDE**

Hans Aage Gravaas

Terror and violence escalate. Condemnation and hatred grow. The contemporary world trembles. Although recent occurrences of terrorism have triggered numerous fruitful discussions on important social issues, the religious dimension is yet to be taken seriously. As people are making their essential decisions of life, politicians and media commentators struggle to comprehend the importance of religion and conflicting worldviews. The secular West seems to undermine the role of religion in almost any context. 'Religious illiteracy' is a common and quite deceptive phenomenon.

## **The Faces of Religion**

One illustration of this illiteracy is the debate on the relationship between religion and terror. The president of the United States, Barrack Obama, claims there is no connection between Islam as a religion and Islamic terrorism. He maintains that the US is not at war with Islam, but is fighting Muslims who have perverted Islam.<sup>1</sup> Higher public officials of other nations have made similar statements. I believe this is an oversimplification. Again, the significance of religion is undervalued.

Like most religions, Islam has many appearances. Claiming that 'the Islamic state' (ISIS), Al Shabaab, Al Qaeda, Boko Haram, Taliban and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood have nothing to do with Islam, is at best misleading. It is of course possible to assert that these influential groups do not represent 'real' Islam or that they are not Muslims at all, but as long as their followers consider themselves Muslims and claim to have taken their inspiration and their political project from Islam, they still represent some of Islam's many facades towards the outside world. Repudiating this point is as erroneous as stigmatising all Muslims as terrorists. There is usually a ditch on either side of the road.

In the same way, Christianity also has many appearances. Even if Christians unceasingly debate what constitutes doctrinal purity and impurity in the Christian faith, all Christian groups in the world, with their diverse religious practices, nevertheless represent the faces of the church as seen by the outside world – this to the delight of some and the despair of others.

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-31523213](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-31523213)

Religion is about beliefs, ideas, values and feelings of different kinds and strengths. While some people are strong in their faith, others are weak. Some are liberal, others conservative, but religion has always helped individuals rationalise and correct their interpretation of human existence, truth and applicable conduct.

### **Missionary Religions and Religious Freedom**

Christianity and Islam are both missionary world religions with some mutually incompatible truth claims and doctrinal tenets. The implications people make of these dissonant voices of religion vary. In history, conflicting convictions have fuelled diversified reactions such as hatred, maltreatment, persecution, martyrdom, love or missionary zeal. The case studies in this book cover a multifaceted history. Religious convictions, cultural particularities and historical preconditions have shaped our modes of interaction with others.

As a Christian of my generation and with a theological upbringing in a Low Church movement in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway, I am convinced that eternal salvation is obtained by grace alone and through faith in God and his only begotten son, Jesus Christ, the one and only Saviour of the world. The uniqueness of Christ is the chief cornerstone of my faith and my involvement in Christian mission. Still, I am equally convinced that followers of other faiths should be granted complete freedom of religious belief as long as they do not set limits to the rights of others. I do not believe that my God, as I see him, forces himself upon people, or that he has to be protected by blasphemy laws. He is fully capable of protecting himself and defending his holy divine nature and glory without human support. God speaks to our conscience. We are all free to choose him or not to choose him, but I believe we all will be made responsible for our choice as we stand in front of him on the day of judgement.

At the same time, I am fully aware of the fact that many members of the historical Christian church have been thinking and acting differently.<sup>2</sup> Some representatives of the church showed neither signs of missionary zeal and love, nor concern for the religious rights of others. Occasionally, Christians have been victims of persecution; at other times they have been harsh agents of it. According to biblical doctrine, it is the obligation of the Christian church to bring the Gospel to the whole world. At the same time, this same church should correct its mistakes and fight for its own rights as well as the rights of others. Every human being has the right to believe and to change his religion or belief. Every human being should have freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to

---

<sup>2</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011).

manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. This is not only documented in §18 in the Human Rights Declaration of the United Nations, but is also in full accordance with the Christian faith.

While the church has its own challenges, others have theirs. In North Korea, the population suffers from a cruel atheist political dictatorship or leadership worship or dictatorial paranoia. In Myanmar, Buddhists mistreat Muslim minorities. In Iraq, 'The Islamic State' does its best to wipe out Christians from a region in which they have lived for centuries before there was something called Islam. In Eritrea, a dictator with a Christian background carries out a high-class religious censorship of 'the accepted religions' as well as harassing and persecuting the unaccepted minority religions. These serve as examples of numerous attacks on religious freedom.

No aggressor is better than others. However, as far as the Christian church and its global missionary task are concerned, Islam seems now to be more challenging than any other religious tradition. As long as numerous Muslim majority societies practise, or intend to practise, a religiously based political theocracy with *shari'a*, apostasy and blasphemy laws, freedom of belief and freedom of expression will be severely restricted for both religious insiders and outsiders. Such societies will never ever be able to live in peace with their surroundings. If we ignore these fundamental challenges, which by their nature are religious, conflicts between Islam, Christianity and modern democracies will never cease. Current terror or violent extremism is therefore arguably the tip of a larger iceberg.

### Core Issues

Some people argue that working for freedom of religious belief for all, and involvement in Christian mission, are mutually contradictory errands. This is not true. Securing the rights of others does not exclude, but rather presupposes, the right of exercising one's own rights. The question, however, is how we find the right balance between our own rights and the rights of others.

In the remainder of this chapter, we will look at how we can express our Christian faith without jeopardising the rights of others. I am convinced that we can both carry out mission and secure everybody's right to freedom of religion.

### Facing the Outcomes of Modernity

The existence of interreligious and intercultural encounters is not of recent origin. Most ethnicities and races have frequently been exposed to the particularities and specifics of others. Every so often, the roots and features of the cultural and religious Self have been identified and shaped as related



to, and in comparison with, the Other. These interreligious and intercultural encounters have in past centuries been multiplied and intensified through the various facets of modernity. Modernity has made such encounters take place more often than before and in new ways.

We must therefore learn to understand the outcomes of modernity, summarised by the term ‘globalisation’, and their impact on the nature of specific human cultures, the modes of interaction between different cultures, and between individuals within a given culture. We must also understand how and to what extent belief systems and worldviews are affected and how these modifications change people and their expressions and practices of faith. I believe these changes powerfully affect the unending theoretical reflection and the practical ministry of the Christian church as well as how others ‘see’ the church.

Although the outcomes of globalisation are matters for discussion, I want to mention some positive factors:

First, new technologies and modes of communication have led to improved mobility, flexibility and proximity between people. The opportunities for intercultural and interreligious encounters have increased immensely and are better than ever.

Secondly, increased ‘closeness’ usually includes the intensified exchange of ideas, insights and resources, and hopefully a healthier sharing of a wide range of benefits and a better life.

Thirdly, globalisation has pushed the opportunities and rights of making religiosity a matter of individual choice, which from the church’s perspective is welcomed as opportunities of securing freedom of religious belief for all, as well as preparing new paths for mission and evangelisation. Tightly-knit tribal societies, nationalistic ideologies and theocratic governments, however, may reject these developments and consider them threatening to social stability, national control and religious monopoly. In their opinion, increased exposure to cultural Otherness paves the way for new and damaging thoughts, beliefs and practices that have to be crushed immediately. In reality, however, culture frequently changes quietly, not from the outside, but through internal processes and indigenous agents of change. Individually or collectively, people make their own changes as they respond to the external world. We tend to pick and choose. Repeatedly, ‘foreign’ thoughts and practices are uprooted from their original settings to be replanted in new and unknown soils. Novel cultural and religious ideas are bluntly rejected, unconsciously copied or carefully contextualised. Freedom of religion is not only a choice between a variety of religions, but also a way of suggesting changes of the most preferable religion from the inside. The importance of religion is a question of what we ‘take our religion to mean’.

The positive outcomes of modernity will inevitably be counterbalanced by negative outcomes:

First, some representatives of the Christian church would probably say that modernity stimulates an unwarranted secularisation of society. Whereas many would oppose an unhealthy juxtaposition of religion and politics, such as in the theocratic *shari'a* practices of Islam, they would on the other hand not applaud the anti-religious sentiments that are accompanying modernity and globalisation. Split-level Christianity<sup>3</sup> based on the sacred/secular divide of modernity and Enlightenment often leads to 'religious schizophrenia'. The church and its members secularise from the inside. God easily becomes 'Lord of the gaps'; his divine domain is limited to certain sectors of a person's consciousness and life. Science and religion appear as conflicting, segregated powers of life instead of forming parts of an integral whole. In this situation, Christian faith easily detaches itself from the public sphere. The church remains a secluded ghetto with high walls and limited impact on broader society.

Secondly, increased cultural pluralism may lead to an intensification of religious intolerance and harmful practices of religion. Rigorously violent religious fundamentalism in the non-western world, such as in some Muslim majority cultures, is not necessarily a counter-reaction to Christianity *per se*, but to an imposed modernity perceived as part of Christianity. People do not necessarily reject economic growth or positive social development, but do reject a social life threatening traditional religion, conventional moral or political stability.

Thirdly, modernity displays the unfair distribution of power between the beneficiaries and benefactors of globalisation. The affluent part of humanity often sets the agenda in every corner of the world and in 'telling the poor how to be happy'. Sometimes cultural imposition is more likely to take place than freedom to change from within or from below. Social injustice engenders anger and hatred, and may result in religious warfare as well as encouraging migration.

Fourthly, globalisation involves exposure to an overwhelming and increased plurality. We have to deal with an extremely confusing religious market place. Homogeneous cultures and societies are very often poorly equipped to deal with minorities and competing ideologies. Globalisation forces us to find ways of dealing with religious differences. While full acceptance of others may threaten our own identity, full rejection threatens a peaceful life with others.

Copyrighted Material

---

<sup>3</sup> Paul Hiebert, Daniel Shaw and Tite Tiénou: 'Responding to Split-Level Christianity and Folkreligion', in *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 16:4 (Winter 1999/2000).

### Emic Perspectives on Religious Freedom and Christian Mission

We must learn to distinguish between ‘emic’ and ‘etic’ descriptions<sup>4</sup> of religion and society as well as responses to changes taking place in a certain society. Confirming the existence of positive and negative dimensions of globalisation is not sufficient. We must also be aware of the fact that we evaluate the various dimensions differently. Disagreement is not always a problem. The question of truth deals equally with incompatible truth claims and complementary perspectives on reality. Our worldviews shape how we ‘see’ reality and define our own cultural and religious identities. They are the glasses through which we interpret history as well as personal experiences.

The interconnection between local and global interpretations of religious freedom and Christian mission must be addressed. Both dimensions are to be considered equally important. Our world is ‘glocal’. Western models and ideas of promoting religious freedom are not always the best. Nor are the western theory and practice of doing mission worldwide preferential. Despite all best intentions, if we neglect or do not involve the local voice, our efforts may easily end up in neo-colonialism. We must learn from each other. Global trends and agendas will always be challenged by indigenous interpretations, local needs and contextual relevance.

People are not always aware of their human rights. To some, religious disinformation, discrimination and persecution are so ‘normal’ that they hardly see a world without it as realistic. On the other hand, people looking at them from the outside may take their own rights for granted and do not understand the wisdom of ‘making haste slowly’ in contexts different from their own. A life that is a bit better than yesterday is far better than losing the small progress that has been made. In brief, it is important to help make others’ lives better, but it is equally important to listen to those who know where the shoe pinches.

Doing mission demands a similar balance between the local and the global. A local church that loses sight of theological continuity and the international horizons of the global church becomes a tribal church or a tribal religion. On the other hand, a church that neglects local

Copyrighted Material

---

<sup>4</sup> The terms ‘emic and etic’ were coined by the American linguist and anthropologist Kenneth Lee Pike (1912-2000). ‘Emic’ (as in ‘phonemics’) refers to the subjective understanding and account of meaning in the sounds of languages, while ‘etic’ (as in ‘phonetics’) refers to the objective study of those sounds. Pike argued that only native speakers are competent judges of emic descriptions, and are thus crucial in providing data for linguistic research, while investigators from outside the linguistic group apply scientific methods in the analysis of language, producing etic descriptions, which are verifiable and reproducible. The terms are also used in anthropology and culture studies to express the difference between insiders’ and outsiders’ points of view.

interpretations of Christianity contradicts the incarnational dimension<sup>5</sup> and the translatability<sup>6</sup> of the Christian faith. Solid and biblically based contextual theologies do not exclude themselves from international input. In fact, intercultural readings of theology are necessary to keep local theologies on a sound and healthy track.

The God of the Bible is my God, our God, and the God of all creation. The saving intervention of Jesus Christ is therefore an internationally relevant message. The communication of the Christian message and the current state of world Christianity are the responsibility of the local church and the totality of all local churches, the global church.

The motivation of the church for fighting for justice and religious freedom should be the same. God is God of all creation. He cares for everybody, and the entire creation must be embraced by his love through word and action, proclamation and *diakonia*, sharing of the Gospel and fighting for religious freedom. This is the task of the global church through the totality of its local branches throughout the world.

### Mission and Contextualisation

The history of mission has often been portrayed as a West-East or a North-South traffic. Such interpretations of history are at best imbalanced or at worst wrong. We have several examples of enthusiastic worldwide commitment to Christian evangelisation from the first chapters of church history up to now. This history also tells us that contextualisation or similar expressions are not modern phenomena, although the terminology as such is of recent origin. We must learn to appreciate the theology of mission and modes of missionary endeavour portrayed in Scripture itself and in church history. The interaction between personal motivation, situational challenges, divine intervention and strategic planning is fascinating. The ministry and the substitutionary death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the achievements of Peter, Paul and their contemporaries are breathtaking. Simultaneously, we must acknowledge the bright and the dark sides of a multifaceted Christian history and legacy. We honour the courageous efforts to bring the Gospel to areas where the name of Christ was not yet known. Concurrently, we regret the triumphalist and colonialist attitudes that sometimes accompanied Christian witness and mission. However, we must learn from our mistakes. The mistakes of history must not encourage the Christian church to keep quiet or to become inactive, but rather to correct the errors of the past.

---

<sup>5</sup> Paul and Meneses Hiebert and Eloise Hiebert, *Incarnational ministries: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009).

The various chapters of this book show that the church has still some way to go towards understanding the importance of religious freedom for all, and how changes in world Christianity affect how we do mission.

### Numerous Changes in World Christianity

The changes in world mission since the Edinburgh conference in 1910 are dramatic.

We are challenged to reflect on the identity of the Christian church and its holistic mission in our time. How shall we who once belonged to the geographical centre of Christian gravity, relate to the new centre of gravity? What can we learn from the churches in the South? To what extent and in what way should we co-operate with them? Let us look at some of these challenges.

The period between 1910 and 2010 was a century of great change in the political, religious and ecclesial landscapes.<sup>7</sup> These can be summarised as follows:

We have experienced two World Wars, the Holocaust, wars in Korea and Vietnam, the so-called Cold War between East and West, genocide in the Middle East, Rwanda and the Balkans, economic highs and lows, ecological crises, terrorist attacks and numerous ethnic and inter-religious conflicts.

The centre of world Christianity has shifted. After the global North for almost 1,000 years had the highest number of Christians, the majority of Christians now live in the global South. Although this change has happened gradually over the past century, it has been seriously evident from the 1970s until today.

The proportion of Christians in the world is about the same as a hundred years ago (about one third), but the population has increased from two to six billion. Therefore, there are now more Christians in the world than ever.

‘The mission field’ has come to us through migration and migration processes. Large groups from countries with different religious traditions have moved to new areas. Many of them are Christians. They challenge us to participate in interfaith dialogue and Christian mission. One of the largest churches in London is Nigerian, and one of the larger churches in Oslo is Chinese.

Pentecostal Christianity is growing fast. Old church structures and denominational divisions are in some cases perceived as irrelevant or inappropriate. African Independent Churches, Chinese house churches, Latin American communities and third world mission structures challenge traditional structures. We should not underestimate the power and potential of these groups.

---

<sup>7</sup> Tod Johnson and Kenneth Ross (eds), *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Edinburgh: University Press 2010).

Several major mission conferences have been held during the past century, and ecumenical organisations have been established. It has been a century of strong missionary effort, and various denominations have come closer to one another. Although important theological tenets to a great extent have remained unchanged, the climate between Protestant and Catholic Christianity has gradually softened. 'Evangelical Christians' seem to be more conscious of social issues than ever before and 'Conciliar Christianity' is equally 'conscientised' of its responsibility for spreading the Gospel.

Parallel to the change in global gravity of Christianity, the linkage between Christianity and prosperity also has changed. While Christianity is strong in parts of the impoverished global South, it gradually loses its foothold in the materially rich West.

Short-term mission is now more common than lifelong service. Long-term missionary commitment seems more difficult than before. Technological development and increased intercultural contact between people may have contributed to an increased understanding of cultural and religious differences. Meanwhile, many people, including missionaries, become restless globetrotters who do not have the same focus on long-term planning and relationship-building that previous generations had.

The technological development has been tremendous. In the first centuries of the church, the infrastructure of the Roman Empire and Pax Romana created great opportunities for the spread of the Gospel. In our time, mobile phones, radio, TV, internet, satellite and modern means of transportation represent similar possibilities, unimaginable in previous centuries.

What consequences does this development have for current and future mission and for the church's involvement in promoting religious freedom?

### **A New Centre of Christianity**

As already mentioned, the global South has experienced explosive church growth. Church and mission historians have described the development in different ways.<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette described the development using concepts like expansion and recession. Ralph Winter regarded evolution as a gradual penetration of larger cultural entities in periods of 400 years. Andrew Walls has used the term 'serial expansion' to describe the growth of Christianity in some areas and its decline in the areas where the former dominated.

While all Christians were Asians at the time of Jesus, the Christian church gradually became European. Although Christianity in the period AD 33-600 spread in nearly all directions, such as Ethiopia, Syria, China and India,

---

<sup>8</sup> Tod Johnson and Kenneth Ross (eds), *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2010).

it is calculated that 92% of all Christians in the world were Northerners (Europeans) in 1500. Christianity took root in the north and west. This figure was, however, gradually reduced and sank to 83% in 1900. Since 1970, Christianity has grown fastest in the south and east. 75% of the world's Christians in 2100 may reside in the south.

What consequences will these changes imply? What happens at theological, confessional, ecclesiological and structural levels? What happens to world mission and its battle for religious freedom?

Western theologians and churches have dominated, and do still dominate, theological thinking, education and authorship. There is in many ways a great cultural, geographical and theological distance between growing churches in the south and the major centres of education in the north and west, which still attracts the attention of 'mission churches' which desperately need leadership training. Nevertheless, for how much longer will western theologians be perceived as relevant or attractive to churches in the south? For how much longer will they request the services of western churches and mission organisations?

### **Theological Challenges**

Church leaders in the south are predominantly more conservative in theology and ethics than their partners in the north. Some non-western Anglican bishops, present at Lausanne III in Cape Town (2010), described a deep theological conflict arising within their denomination.

This conflict had evolved over time and reached a critical point when the issue of homosexual partnership was pushed after the instalment of Gene Robinson as a bishop in the United States. We also find similar conflicts within other denominations, such as in the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia. In 2010 the leadership of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Church (EECMY) sent a letter to one of its oldest partners, the Church of Sweden (CoS), and demanded that the church must repent from accepting homosexual partnership and marriage in order to maintain co-operative relations with the African church. The relationship between the EECMY and the CoS, as well as with the Evangelical Church of America (ELCA), are more or less defunct.

This exemplifies how theological conflicts may influence the relationship between north and south in the future. The south will not, as before, automatically request western theological expertise, education, missionary support or co-operation.

If we look at specific theological issues, we often see that southern churches, whether they are Roman Catholic, Anglican, Pentecostal or Evangelical, have a stronger focus on healing, prophecy, repentance and strict Christian morality than their sister-churches in the north. Southern churches may also in some cases have a stronger emphasis on the importance of social justice. Quite often, they challenge western

protectionism of property and privatisation, and speak more favourably of social responsibility in the public sphere.

### **Ethno-Linguistic Challenges**

The shift of gravity of the Christian movement towards the south also has ethno-linguistic implications. Spanish was already in 1980 the language in the world that most Christians spoke. Christianity is now a religion that encompasses a wide variety of ethnic groups, cultural traditions and languages. This involves a need for making various resources available in different languages, such as Bible translation, Bible stories, liturgies and literature.

Nevertheless, translations in the opposite direction are also needed. How should non-western language groups contribute to global Christianity in addition to their local impact? The spiritual input of the emerging churches should be made available to others and be translated into English, Spanish, German, French and other major world languages. The Christian faith and its contextual dimension should be lived out in a sound and constructive tension between the global and the local church. Christianity must be incarnational without becoming a 'tribal' religion, disconnected from external critique of the international hermeneutical community of believers. We must challenge the habit of western control of southern churches. To what extent do we listen to what these churches communicate to us – theologically, spiritually and strategically?

There is no doubt that the English language still is a significant force within the global church. English is the language that connects most people, but is also a factor that favours some people at the expense of others. We often see this in international conferences. The Anglo-American 'worship industry' has a strong impact on most meetings, and native English speakers play key roles that do not necessarily correspond with either Christian maturity or spiritual superiority. Many church leaders have significant experience with Christians from other parts of the world. If given sufficient space, such people may give us a deeper and more complete understanding of what Christian faith is all about.

Copyrighted Material

### **The Challenge of Poverty**

The connection between Christianity and prosperity has changed. While Christianity is now strong in the impoverished parts of the non-western world, it is gradually losing its foothold in the materially rich western world. Many Christians in the south lack privileges such as good health care. Countries like Botswana, Zimbabwe and Swaziland, with a high proportion of Christians, are also countries that are hardest hit by AIDS. Charismatic churches with a focus on exorcism, healing, signs and wonders are in many cases attractive to people who live on the edge of survival. A



credible Christian witness in the south presupposes a holistic understanding of mission whereby social responsibility and evangelism are strongly interrelated.

Although congregations in the south experience rapid growth, the materially rich churches in the north should not consider their missionary ministry among churches in the south as concluded. Christians in the south may still request the efforts of international churches and organisations in areas such as fighting poverty and injustice, leadership development and theological education. Most of all, a co-ordinated joint effort of the global church is needed to reach out to the people groups that have not yet heard the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ, and that have no Christian witness available in their immediate cultural setting.

The Cape Town Commitment is crystal-clear as far as responsibility for world mission is concerned:

We rejoice in the growth and strength of emerging mission movements in the majority world and the ending of the old pattern of 'from the West to the Rest'. But we do not accept the idea that the baton of mission responsibility has passed from one part of the world Church to another. There is no sense in rejecting the past triumphalism of the West, only to relocate the same ungodly spirit in Asia, Africa, or Latin America. No one ethnic group, nation, or continent can claim the exclusive privilege of being the ones to complete the Great Commission. Only God is sovereign.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Challenge of Religious Freedom**

The majority of the world's population holds a religious belief. Unfortunately, people's freedom to choose and express their belief is being increasingly restricted.<sup>10</sup> This stands in glaring contrast to Declaration of Human Rights Article 18:

'Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.'

One of the reasons why religious freedom is violated may be because not everyone knows what this right entails. It is *not*:

- Protection of religions themselves, nor their ideas and doctrines, from ridicule or criticism
- About enforcing religious harmony and homogeneity
- An exclusively western or Christian concept
- Removal of religion into the private sphere in secular societies

<sup>9</sup> [www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment](http://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment)

<sup>10</sup> Stefanus Alliance International, *Freedom of Religious Belief for Everyone* (Oslo: Stefanus Alliance, 2012).

Religion touches the deepest levels of an individual's inner conviction. Faith relates to cognitive, ideological, emotional and behavioural factors indicating the direction of a person's life. Religious doctrines are not excluded from criticism, but the person that holds these views should be protected from compulsion, coercion, disinformation, discrimination and violent persecution. Freedom of religion is not about working for religious unity, but to work for acceptance of faith, changing beliefs and practising one's faith. The lack of religious freedom is not something that Christians alone suffer, but on a world scale, is a problem that followers of most religions and beliefs are affected by. If people have the right to be themselves, no one can claim that the religious dimension, which for many is the most important, should be forced out of the public arena. To believe is not less legitimate than not to believe.

The church has four tasks to deal with: first, to work for religious freedom for all. Secondly, to call for speak up for those who have their freedom denied. Thirdly, to serve the persecuted church and secure its continued presence and mission within its own boundaries and beyond. Fourthly, to reach out to the unreached with the Gospel in words and action.

'The 10/40 Window'<sup>11</sup> envisions the 'Resistance belt', the areas where the Christian message has limited access. This belt is more or less equivalent to the World Watch list<sup>12</sup> of Open Doors ranking the top fifty countries where the persecution of Christians is most severe.

### Together in Mission

In the light of the legacy of Edinburgh 1910 and the Edinburgh 2010 series, we need a revitalised focus on peoples of the world that are yet to be reached with the Gospel. Church history has revealed a serious temptation or inclination among local churches to be self-possessed and self-occupied. This temptation or inward focus might very well also affect mission organisations that used to consider international mission to be their special responsibility. In future, we must adapt to the current shift in world Christianity. The task of world mission rests on the shoulders of the global church, and by no means on western churches and mission agencies alone. A revised mapping of world Christianity and mission is necessary, as well as new modes of co-operation between local churches and organisations within the global church. In my opinion, Ralph Winter's distinction between sodality and modality structures of church and mission<sup>13</sup> is still

<sup>11</sup> [www.gmi.org/files/5412/6757/0620/10-40\\_window\\_a.jpg](http://www.gmi.org/files/5412/6757/0620/10-40_window_a.jpg)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/tag-blog-post/the-2015-world-watch-list-unveiled>

<sup>13</sup> Ralph Winter, 'The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission', in *Missiology* 1974, 2:1. 121-39.

valid and worth considering as we prepare for the future. The evangelistic mission movements help to revitalise the existing churches as well as being on the cutting edge of world evangelisation. Mission is still the task of ‘the burning hearts’.

As we prepare for the next century of world mission, we must reconsider our existing models.

First, the ecumenical dimension must be emphasised. Working for Christian unity and serving God in unity is what Jesus has told us to do (John 17). Historically, controversies within the body of Christ have often hampered the expansion of God’s kingdom. Without neglecting our battle for doctrinal purity, we must avoid unnecessary denominational overlap and destructive proselytism within the Christian family.<sup>14</sup>

Secondly, historical churches must be mobilised to do mission across cultural and religious boundaries. Some of these churches are oppressed minorities with a long history of persecution. To cope with external turbulence, or simply to survive violent oppression, some of them are rather inward-looking, fearful and quiet, with limited opportunities or strength to share their faith with followers of other religions. Fighting for their religious freedom will secure both their human rights and continued existence within their homelands, and strengthen their involvement in Christian mission within and across own boundaries. We need to find modes of interaction with these churches. They need our support and encouragement.

Thirdly, the time of western dominance in world mission is ended. As the gravity of world Christianity has moved from the north to the south, the need for new structures of global mission has emerged. ‘Mission’ is no longer a one-way traffic, but a movement in all directions. The churches of the global north and west must develop long-lasting partnerships with churches and organisations of the global south and east without patronising and dominating their brothers and sisters. Together they are able to reach out to groups that have not yet been reached with the Gospel. Mission networks in Africa, Asia and Latin America are not intertwined with the western colonial system and do not carry the white man’s burden. They blend in where others have no access. At the same time, the history and future of the Christian church is global. Together we must learn from our past and face the future. The African proverb powerfully expresses what is at stake. ‘If you want to go fast, walk alone. If you want to go far, walk together.’

---

<sup>14</sup> John Gibaut and Knud Jørgensen (eds), *Called to Unity for the Sake of Mission* (Oxford: Regnum 2014).

### Together in the Struggle for Religious Freedom

The battle for religious freedom must be considered a central element in the holistic mission of the Christian church. It belongs to its social responsibility and *diakonia*, grounded in Scripture and a Christian understanding of human value and the dignity of man. Our mandate is not justified by the Declaration of Human Rights §18 alone, but has its foundation in the Christian faith itself. It is also possible to argue that §18 is derived from or inspired by Christian faith.

Over three quarter of the world's population live in countries where religious freedom is limited.<sup>15</sup> As Christians, we cannot close our eyes to this fact. This situation violates fundamental human rights and the Christian faith and hinders the Christian church in its right to exercise its faith through international Christian mission. It is no coincidence that Christianity stands weakest where religious freedom suffers the poorest conditions. The unreached people groups<sup>16</sup> in the world are largely congruent with those groups which have their religious freedom severely limited, or in areas where the persecution of Christians is most intense.<sup>17</sup>

More and more people experience discrimination, oppression, violations and even death because of their faith – or lack of faith. It happens on all continents, and people of all faiths are more or less affected. Why should Christians care about religious freedom for Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and those belonging to other religions? Should we not care about our own? Why should Christian churches defend the right of others not to believe in Jesus?

Although I believe we have a special responsibility to care for our brothers and sisters in Christ, the fundamental right of religious freedom applies to all. 'Doing good to all' is a genuine Christian virtue. 'Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers' (Gal. 6:10).<sup>18</sup>

Religious freedom implies the right to seek answers to existential questions, the freedom to believe what you want – or to choose not to have any faith – and to exercise faith freely and without fear. This right, strongly protected in international human rights, is a matter for everyone, including for the Christian church.

The global church must be aware of suffering Christians around the world. We must include them in our prayers and do what we can to serve their needs. Not everybody is aware of the fact that Hindu nationalists daily attack Christians in India, that Eritrean Pentecostals are imprisoned in containers in the desert, that over 400 Christians have been arrested in Iran over the past four years. Not everybody knows the seriousness of the

<sup>15</sup> [www.pewresearch.org/religion](http://www.pewresearch.org/religion)

<sup>16</sup> [www.globalmissionsnetwork.info/synergyArtic-005.html](http://www.globalmissionsnetwork.info/synergyArtic-005.html)

<sup>17</sup> [www.opendoors.org.au/persecutedchristians/countryprofiles](http://www.opendoors.org.au/persecutedchristians/countryprofiles)

<sup>18</sup> New International Version.

situation for Christians in the Middle East. The 'birthplace' of Christianity is gradually being emptied of Christians. It is important for us as Christians to respond to this.

Nevertheless, our involvement should not stop at our own doorstep. In addition to suffering with the body of Christ, we are also called to love our neighbour whoever he or she is, or whatever faith he or she holds. The parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates how Jesus related to and dealt with others. Hatred between Jews and Samaritans was so strong that they would make long detours to avoid each other. Yet Jesus uses this Samaritan to illustrate how we should love the vulnerable and suffering stranger with practical love.

Although biblical language differs from the modern language of religious freedom in the Human Rights Declaration, it is full of exhortations to love our fellow human being and to fight for everybody. When proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, we must take its demands for social justice seriously. Words should always be followed by action. The prophets of the Old Testament bravely rebuked the people of Israel and their kings when they violated the weak. In their opinion, orphans, widows, strangers and aliens were vulnerable groups who deserved special care.

Violations of religious freedom often affect vulnerable and marginalised groups the most, such as minorities, women, children and refugees. Fighting for religious freedom is therefore a fight for human existence and dignity. Where Christians suffer, they are rarely alone. Governments, neighbourhoods and religious extremist groups often attack 'the religious others', whoever they are.

The church needs to fight for weak and oppressed religious minorities, even when it does not share their beliefs. We need to stand up and defend their cause in education, advocacy and humanitarian work. Defending religious freedom for all is a strong Christian testimony of love. This does not mean that we accept the truth claims of other religions.

The Cape Town Commitment<sup>19</sup> nicely summarises the balance between maintaining one's own convictions and the battle for securing religious freedom for all:

Upholding human rights by defending religious freedom is not incompatible with following the way of the cross when confronted with persecution. There is no contradiction between being willing personally to suffer the abuse or loss of our own rights for the sake of Christ, and being committed to advocate and speak up for those who are voiceless under the violation of their human rights. We must also distinguish between advocating the rights of people of other faiths and endorsing the truth of their beliefs. We can defend the freedom of others to believe and practice their religion without accepting that religion as true.

---

<sup>19</sup> [www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment](http://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment)

### **To All People**

There is no such thing as a Christian culture. No cultures are purer or cleaner than others. Cultures are human constructions that develop and change, but people of all cultures can become Christians. Culture consists of both good and evil. In doing Christian mission and fighting for religious freedom, we aim at protecting good and combating evil. All people are created in the image of God. They are given the right to choose him or to reject him. We are therefore called to fight unjust people, ideologies and structures that forbid people to make these choices. In a time of increased international political turbulence and conflict, we need to address the roots of conflicts between Christianity and other belief systems, and to improve the interreligious interaction between different groups in the world.

In the midst of the existence of contextual theologies, it is important to distinguish between the continuity and discontinuity of the Christian message. Scripture does communicate truth claims that are universally true and that are to be obeyed by all people that call themselves Christian. The apostle Paul says, 'I am obligated to both Greeks and non-Greeks, to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome. I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile' (Rom 1:14-16).

# DO CHRISTIAN WITNESS AND MISSION PROVOKE PERSECUTION?

Jan A.B. Jongeneel

Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to *provoke* one another to love and good deeds.

Hebrews 10:23-24 (New Revised Standard Version)

## Introduction

Christianity is not the only witnessing and missionary religion. Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam are equally outreaching religions. Moreover, humanism as a worldview and communism as an ideology are expanding belief-systems as well. Samuel P. Huntington wrote his *Clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order* (1996), in which he paid considerable attention to the expansion of contemporary world religions, worldviews, and ideologies as sources of ‘clashes’ in and between civilisations.<sup>1</sup> His book caused a huge debate, in which themes such ‘provocation’ and ‘persecution’ were discussed implicitly and explicitly.

The history of two millennia of Christian witness and mission is also the history of two millennia of provocation and persecution of Christians, and by Christians in the midst of other religions, worldviews, and ideologies. Peaceful Christians in the early church were provoked and persecuted. After the conversion of Emperor Constantine the Great (325) and the birth of the *corpus christianum*, however, Christians also provoked (in a bad sense) and even persecuted adherents of other faiths. In other words, Christians are not only the object, but also the subject, of provocation and persecution in human history.

This chapter deals with a specific topic: ‘Do Christian witness and mission provoke persecution?’ This intriguing question suggests that Christian witness and mission have many aspects and many effects. One of the aspects can be the provocation of adherents of other religions, worldviews, and ideologies by Christians. One of the possible responses of these people groups to Christian provocation can be the persecution of Christians in their neighbourhood. Going back from the very end to the beginning of the complex process of action and reaction in this field, the question must be raised whether Christians through their own words and

---

<sup>1</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order* (New York: Simon-Schuster, 1996).

own deeds have caused and still are causing their own discrimination and persecution. The concept behind this way of reasoning is the following: if Christians did not provoke the adherents of other belief-systems, they possibly would not experience any persecution by the adherents of other faiths.

This missiological chapter studies the interaction between Christian witness and mission, on the one hand, and provocation and persecution, on the other hand. It starts with an explanation of the term 'provocation' and its use in modern societies, and a case study in which this term was used by an opponent (in a bad sense). Then it deals with Jesus Christ, the crucified, resurrected and exalted Lord, as the starting-point of Christianity as a provoking religion. The next sections pay attention to the birth and growth of Christianity in a minority situation and thereafter in a majority situation. The final sections are systematic in nature. They discuss the essence of Christian witness and mission in a global setting, reflecting upon their link with 'provocation' and 'persecution'. They deal with the following crucial questions: Is Christianity a provocative religion? Is the Christian message provocative in nature? Are Christian messengers and missionaries always and everywhere provocative? Are Christians who present the Gospel with 'a crusading mind' provocative while Christians who present it with 'a crucified mind' not? Are foreign missionaries provocative *per se*? How can unnecessary provocation and persecution be avoided? Is the persecution of Christians always due to them having used provocative words and deeds? Or is persecution by adherents of other faiths time and again also caused by factors outside the control of Christians?

### **'Provocation' as a Term**

The meaning of the terms 'provocation' and 'provoke' differs from context to context. In this chapter these words are used in a general way, and not in the specific way criminal law is using them: 'words of conduct leading to a killing in hot passion and without deliberation.'<sup>2</sup> 'Provocation' originates from the Latin noun *provocatio*, meaning '(higher) appeal'. Today's use of this term differs slightly from the original understanding: 'the action of provoking; something that incites, instigates, angers, or irritates.' Consequently the verb 'to provoke' is used as follows: 'to anger, to stir up, to incite or stimulate to action.'<sup>3</sup> This implies that by and large people use the word 'provocation' in a bad sense. But using it in a good sense is also possible: 'to stimulate to action.'

<sup>2</sup> American College Dictionary (1962). Cf. Jeremy Horder, *Provocation and responsibility* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> American College Dictionary (1962).



Chimpanzees seem to be able to act in a quasi-provocative way.<sup>4</sup> But human beings are the creatures who hold the record in provoking. It occurs in all societies.<sup>5</sup> And it takes place in all professions. Modern philosophers both provoke and are provoked.<sup>6</sup> Police officers seem to face more provocation than other professionals.<sup>7</sup> History proves that provocation and excessive self-defence occur at individual and collective levels. They can ultimately cause war between human beings, societies and nations.

Bible translations rarely use the term 'to provoke'. They prefer verbs such as 'to stir up'. They used the latter term to describe Paul's positive response to the collection of money for poor Christians in Jerusalem: 'Your zeal has *stirred up* most of them' (2 Cor. 9:2). But the New Revised Standard Version also uses the verb 'to provoke' at least twice, once in a bad sense and the other time in a good sense. The former is presented in the description of Paul's rules for Christian households: 'Fathers, do not *provoke* your children, or they may lose heart' (Col. 3:21). The term 'to provoke' in a good sense occurs in the opening quote of this chapter: '*provoke* one another to love' (Heb. 10:24). This chapter follows the New Revised Standard Version in using the term 'provocation' in both senses.

Talking about God can be provocative in both a good and a bad sense.<sup>8</sup> Doing Christian mission at home and abroad can even be more provocative. Christian witnesses and missionaries both provoke and are provoked. So far, the link between 'provocation' and 'mission' is insufficiently investigated. It seems that only one monograph is devoted to this topic. The Dutch scholar Wessel H. ten Boom published a theological essay on Augustine's preaching against the Jews, entitled in English translation: *Provocation*.<sup>9</sup>

'Provocation', in both a good and in a bad sense, is a spiritual and moral problem. It manifests itself both within and outside Christianity as a world religion. The main thesis of this chapter is that Christian witnesses and missionaries both are challenged and challenge, both are provoked and provoke, both suffer and occasionally are causing the suffering of neighbours of other faiths. This chapter necessarily has its limitations: for

---

<sup>4</sup> Otto M.J. Adang, *Teasing, harassment, provocation: The development of quasi-aggressive behaviour in chimpanzees* (Utrecht: Utrecht University, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Yeo, *Unrestricted killings and the law: A comparative analysis of the laws of provocation and excessive self-defense in India, England, and Australia* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press., 1998).

<sup>6</sup> David Egan, Stephen Reynolds & Aaron J. Wendland (eds), *Wittgenstein and Heidegger: Pathways and provocations* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Paul G. Chevigny, *Cops and rebels: A study of provocation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger et al, *The end of time? The provocation of talking about God* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Wessel H. ten Boom, *Provocatie: Augustinus' preek tegen de joden: Theologisch essay* (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok, 2006).

instance, it does not discuss the psychological aspects of provocation and suffering, namely feelings, of anger, irritation, etc.

### Case Study: Missionaries Murdered – Due to their Provocation?

In Indonesia, Bali is the island with Hinduism as the ruling religion. In the nineteenth century the Utrecht Missionary Association (*Utrechtse Zendingsvereniging*) started to do missionary work among its population. In 1866 Jacob de Vroom arrived there and started a mission school. He baptised the first Balinese Christian, Goesti Wajang Karangasem. In 1881, De Vroom was murdered by two of his indigenous servants. It became obvious that this crime was committed at the instigation of Karangasem, who was disappointed in his hope for a bright future. All three criminals involved were brought to court, sentenced, and hanged. The Utrecht Missionary Association pleaded for mercy for the criminals, but its petition was entered too late to prevent the execution of the three persons involved.<sup>10</sup>

At the time of the murder of de Vroom, the linguist Herman Neubronner van der Tuuk worked in Bali. Before he accepted a position in the Dutch colonial government in Bali, he served as a Bible translator of the Netherlands Bible Society (*Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap*) in Sumatra. In Bali van der Tuuk became a recalcitrant free-thinker. In a letter to a Dutch friend, he wrote the following lines on the murder of de Vroom, in which he used the term ‘provocation’ twice, the second time in a bad sense:

Here a missionary has recently been clubbed to death... This murder will be followed by others. In New Guinea four missionaries were killed, according to the newspapers, without provocation. As if it were no *provocation* to preach to the local people that their God was a devil and that everybody who believed in that God was possessed.

According to van der Tuuk, Christian missions provoked the adherents of other religions in a bad sense, with a violent response to the Christian message and its messengers as reaction. He held the view that the first ones who needed to be blamed were not the murderers of the Christian missionaries, but the missionaries who viewed the Christian faith as the only ‘true religion’, and who consequently treated adherents of the non-Christian religions as followers of ‘false religions’.

<sup>10</sup> Jan L. Swellengrebel, *Kerk en tempel op Bali* (‘s-Gravenhage: Van Hoeve, 1948), 63-64.

<sup>11</sup> Herman Neubronner van der Tuuk, *De pen in gal gedoopt: Een keuze uit brieven en documenten samengesteld door Rob Nieuwenhuys* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1982), 181. My translation.

### Jesus and his Disciples as Provocative Messengers

Moses and Muhammad killed some fellow human beings, but the Buddha and Jesus never killed anybody. That is one of the reasons why the Hindu Mahatma Gandhi sketched Jesus, the great preacher of the Sermon on the Mount, as the embodiment of the 'principle of non-violence (*ahimsa*).'<sup>12</sup> At another level, however, Jesus was violent. When confronted with buying and selling in the temple complex at Jerusalem, he 'overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold doves' (Matt. 21:12). This 'holy' action at a 'holy' place was clearly provocative. It is quite remarkable that the four gospels are silent 'about any prompt response by either the temple police or the Romans, who could look down on the temple area from the adjacent Antonia tower.'<sup>13</sup>

Jesus' crucifixion can be described in a variety of ways. One way is to emphasise that the claim of Jesus to be the Messiah provoked the Jews to condemn and execute him. Before the High Priest Caiaphas, Jesus asserted that he was the coming 'Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power' (Mark 14:62, quoting Psalm 110:1). The New Testament scholar Markus Bockmuehl commented to this text: 'This assertion... evokes the High Priest's emotive charge of blasphemy, thus providing the officials of the Sanhedrin with convenient grounds for a guilty verdict.'<sup>14</sup>

The New Testament testifies that the Jesus story did not end with the crucifixion, but with the resurrection and exaltation. On the day of Pentecost, Peter assured the people of Israel, that 'God has made him both Lord/Kyrios and Messiah/Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified' (Acts 2:36). This apostolic message was a clear provocation, explicitly to the Jews: 'Jesus is the Messiah/Christ promised in the Old Testament,' and implicitly to the Romans: 'Jesus Christ is Lord/Kyrios,' in contrast with the ideology of the Roman Empire, with its pseudo-religious claim of 'Caesar/the Emperor is Lord/Kyrios'.

Since the day of Pentecost, Christians proclaim Jesus as the crucified and resurrected Messiah in the context of Judaism, and as the exalted Lord/Kyrios in the context of the Roman Empire and other Gentile communities. Their confession that 'Jesus Messiah/Christ is Lord/Kyrios, to the glory of God the Father' (Phil. 2:11), is nothing but a challenge to the adherents of all non-Christian religions, worldviews and ideologies, past and present, inviting them to accept Jesus as Christ and Lord/Kyrios, and to join the community of believers.

<sup>12</sup> M.M. Thomas, *The acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* (London: SCM Press, 1969), 193-238.

<sup>13</sup> Leander E. Keck, *Who is Jesus? History in perfect tense* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 122.

<sup>14</sup> Markus Bockmuehl, *This Jesus: Martyr, Lord, Messiah* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996), 95.

The New Testament era is an excellent period in mission and church history for exploring the difference between the Christians' *intention* to preach the Gospel and to provoke others to confess Jesus as Christ and Lord, and the non-Christians' *interpretation* of the Christians' witnessing words and deeds as profound provocation. The Gospel challenged and provoked both individuals and people groups, but the way in which it challenged is primarily and ultimately characterised by love (*agape*), having no intention at all to hurt any human being in Jewish society and the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, Jews and Romans interpreted not only the Christian message, but also the Christians' way of life as a thorough provocation, which needed to be answered immediately, powerfully and violently.

### **Christianity in a Minority Situation: Provocation and Persecution**

Until the conversions of Tiridates in the Armenian Kingdom and of Constantine the Great in the Roman Empire (both in the fourth century), Christians were everywhere in a minority situation, having no political power at all. Their power was merely their trust in and their representation of Jesus Christ through a simple loving lifestyle. The *Epistle to Diognetus* (at the end of the second century) viewed it as the mission of the Christians 'to be poor, yet making many rich, and to repay insults with honour'.<sup>15</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea (died in 339), the first great church historian, added: 'Most of the disciples at that time... had first fulfilled the Saviour's precept by distributing their substance to the needy. Afterwards leaving their country, they performed the office of the evangelists to those who had not yet heard the faith.'<sup>16</sup>

After the conversions of Tiridates and Constantine the Great, Christianity remained a minority outside the Armenian Kingdom and the Roman Empire. This situation continues until now in some continents and nations. With the exception of Armenia and the Philippines, today's Asia is a continent with Christianity in a minority situation. Asian governments and citizens are challenged by the message and lifestyle of the Christians as a powerless people group. Nevertheless, many regard the words and deeds of Asian Christians as a threat. They take peaceful and/or violent steps against Christians. The mission and church history of Asia is a history full of suffering, persecution, martyrdom, etc. on the one hand, and a history of bold witness to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, on the other hand.

In all continents the Christian community proclaims Jesus Christ as the crucified, risen and exalted Lord. But Christians in a minority situation are closer to the New Testament situation. They experience more fellowship with Christ as the Crucified One than Christians in a majority situation. At

<sup>15</sup> The Epistle to Diognetus, 5:13-15.

<sup>16</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical history*, 3.37.2.

the same time, they experience the presence of the risen and exalted One in the midst of their sufferings. By the sending of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ empowers them to endure, to persevere and to witness openly or covertly to their neighbours of other faiths. The greatest challenge in the lives and communities of Christians in a minority situation is not 'to suffer dishonour for the sake of the name [of Jesus Christ]' (Acts 5:41), but to be confronted with fellow Christians who 'renounce the faith' (1 Tim. 4:1). Apostasy did not occur only in the New Testament era and in the early church, but takes place also in today's settings of Christians in a minority situation. Nothing hurts Christians in this situation more than to see known fellow Christians forsaking their faith commitment and leaving the church.<sup>17</sup>

### **Christianity in a Majority Situation: Provocation – No Suffering?**

After the conversions of King Tiridates and Emperor Constantine the Great, the situation in the Armenian Kingdom and the Roman Empire changed drastically. This change can easily be compared with the change Buddhism underwent when in eastern India King Ashoka (third century before Christ) converted to Buddhism and became the first Buddhist king. After these 'royal' conversions, Buddhism and Christianity experienced a great metamorphosis: from being a powerless and peaceful minority religion they became powerful religions in a majority situation. They did not any longer object to the presence of soldiers in their midst and did not any longer refuse to declare war and to make war if undertaken for the sake of maintaining and expanding their own faith.

Since Constantine the Great, Christianity moved away from its peaceful roots and started to create a *corpus christianum*, using political power for the conversion of the many indigenous people groups who still adhered to their primal religions. Faced with ruling Christians, these groups were compelled to decide: 'baptism or death' (or, in Dutch: *doop of dood*). The *corpus christianum* enabled the West also to make military expeditions to recover the Holy Land from the hands of Muslims. The seven Crusades (1096-1291) provoked both Eastern Orthodox Christianity and the Islamic world.<sup>18</sup> In modern times, the mediæval *corpus christianum* was transformed into western colonialism in the non-western world. It is obvious that in this way Asians, Africans and native Americans were provoked by western 'Christian' standards and behaviour and confronted with the huge slave trade from sub-Saharan Africa to the New World. In the post-colonial era, Europe and North America have changed their

<sup>17</sup> Jan A.B. Jongeneel, 'Apostasy,' in Inus Daneel, Charles van Engen and Hendrik Vroom (eds), *Fullness of life for all: Challenges for mission in early 21st century* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), 181-87.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen C. Neill, *A history of Christian missions* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1979), 113-16.

politics, but continue to provoke and, in cases of war, cause the suffering of innocent people groups outside their own realm.

Although Christianity in a majority situation denied the Gospel time and again (the Crusades, slave trade, etc.), it also did marvellous things. One recent positive act was its initiative in creating a universal standard of human rights. Due to the ambition and power of western 'Christian' nations after the Second World War, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which guarantees human rights to all human beings, including the freedom of religion or belief (Article 18). At the time of debating this Declaration in the United Nations, Saudi Arabia was the only member-nation which protested against giving the right to change religion to individuals. But Pakistan as a member-nation defended this right against Saudi Arabia, because it wanted to guarantee the freedom of every human being to become a Muslim by conversion.<sup>19</sup> This Universal Declaration makes it clear that no nation has the right to persecute individuals or people groups because of their religion or belief. The continuous fight against violations of human rights, including the violation of the right to exercise freedom of religion or belief, can be globally effective only when western 'Christian' nations give convincing examples in their own societies. Annual reports of violations of human rights, including violations of the freedom of religion, by Christian institutions such as Open Doors are very helpful, but reports and additional recommendations by a neutral forum such as the United Nations can convince a broader audience than Christian organisations and networks are able to. Adherents of other religions, worldviews, and ideologies look at reports like those produced by Open Doors as being prone to special pleading.

Christianity in a majority situation enabled Christian missionaries to reach out non-violently in the non-western world. Since Columbus and Vasco da Gama, thousands of unarmed western missionaries engaged in the non-western world, preaching the Gospel, teaching in schools, healing the sick, helping the poor and oppressed, etc. In these activities, conformity with the Crucified can be observed and must be recognised. Due to tropical diseases, numerous western missionaries died an early death. Due to wars and other outbreaks of violence, many others were persecuted and killed. Some cruelties and killings may have been caused by the missionaries' unfamiliarity with local customs and/or their incautious behaviour. But other persecutions and killings seem to have happened for reasons which cannot be linked with the person and the work of the western missionaries involved. Although in modern times westerners' involvement in the expansion of Christianity in the non-western world has its bad sides, it has

---

<sup>19</sup> Theodoor C. van Boven, *De volkenrechterlijke bescherming van de godsdienstvrijheid* (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1967), 104-106.

also its benefits: these included education and health care, as well as pastoral care (forgiveness of sins, etc.) and serving the needy.

In the past and even today, some Christians in a majority situation look down at fellow Christians in minority situations out of pity or for other reasons. Often they do not take into account that material wealth (as in affluent societies) and spiritual health are different realities. In the non-western world some western missionaries still behave as if they were the first among equals. Christians living in minority situations, without western Christians in their midst, are the first people accountable for witness and mission in the complex contexts of being a minority in nations dominated by other faiths.

### **Authoritative Christian Witness and Mission in Today's Challenging Setting**

In the world of contemporary religions, worldviews and ideologies, Christians and Christian organisations are called to be present to abide in 'faith, hope and love, love being the greatest of these three' (1 Cor. 13:13), to fight hate, to witness to Jesus Christ as Lord, to convert people, to plant churches, to Christianise cultures – all 'in Christ's way' – that is, by participating in the passion, and witnessing to the resurrection.<sup>20</sup>

All religions, worldviews, and ideologies have their own claims and provoke in their own ways. The claim of the Christians exceeds other claims. No founder of a movement has ever made such an all-embracing claim as the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ: 'All authority (Greek: *exousia*) in heaven and on earth has been given to me' (Matt. 28:18). The South African missionary scholar David J. Bosch commented on this statement of faith: 'What is new is the universal extension of his authority... Matthew takes up a theme from the earlier part of his Gospel: in 4:8-9 the devil offered Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them" if Jesus would only bow down and worship him. But Jesus refused. Now, in the final scene of the Gospel, the disciples worship him and he announces that God has given him much more power than the devil has promised.'<sup>21</sup> The devil has power on earth, but Jesus has more power on earth than the devil; moreover, the devil has no power in heaven, but Jesus exercises power in heaven also. The one who has universal power is the Servant, the preacher of the Sermon on the Mount (no retaliation, love for one's enemies), the healer of illnesses, the crucified, risen and exalted Lord. Only Jesus Christ is the Lord of the universe – neither the devil, nor any influential founder of a religion, worldview or ideology has such universal power and authority as Jesus has.

<sup>20</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Mission in Christ's way* (Geneva: WCC, 1987), 22-31.

<sup>21</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming mission: Paradigm shifts in theology of mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 78.



Christian witness and mission are authoritative because of Christ's authority. Their authority is a conditional authority: as long as Christians walk in Christ's way, they have authority; if they stray from Christ's way, they lose the right and power to preach, to teach and to heal. In today's setting, many Christians represent Christ as he wanted to be presented to the human community, but there also are Christians who do the opposite of walking in Christ's way. The latter group of Christians, being Christians merely in name, makes the road hard for the former group of Christians. Christian witness and mission are often obstructed by Christians-in-name, who are not committed to the Gospel and the missionary task. However, Christian witness and mission are able to overcome internal and external obstacles. Living in an affluent society, I am very impressed by the witness given by the thousands of martyrs in the twentieth century. The Italian scholar Andrea Riccardi wrote a history of the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant Christians who in the past century were imprisoned, tortured and murdered by the Hitler regime in Germany, or the communists in Eastern Europe and China, the Ottoman Empire, or other oppressive regimes.<sup>22</sup> The testimonies given by these Christians facing death are immensely impressive. Some publicly confessed their faith in front of their killers: 'Jesus Christ is Lord.' Others repeated loudly Jesus' prayer on the cross: 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34). Such statements of faith and such intercessory prayers by committed Christians facing death are the absolute and final provocation of people who persecute fellow human beings. Rarely were the killers who witnessed the death of these martyrs converted to Christ afterwards, but in the Toraja area of Indonesia, Buyang, the murderer of the Dutch missionary Anthony A. van de Loosdrecht (1885-1917), became a baptised Christian.<sup>23</sup>

### **Necessary and Unnecessary Provocative Behaviour in Witness and Mission**

After his arrival in Athens, Paul 'was deeply distressed [or provoked] to see that the city was full of idols' (Acts 17:16). After a while he went to the Areopagus, the intellectual centre of the city. In his speech to the Greek philosophers and poets there, Paul challenged their cyclical view of time and history, which did not allow the possibility of 'newness' in world history. As an adherent of the Hebrew linear view of time and history, Paul

<sup>22</sup> Andrea Riccardi, *De eeuw van de martelaren: Geschiedenissen van christenen uit de twintigste eeuw vermoord omwille van hun geloof* (Tielt: Lannoo, 2002). This is a Dutch translation of the original Italian edition: *Il secolo del martirio* (Milano: Mondadori, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> Bas Plaisier, *Over bruggen en grenzen: De communicatie van het Evangelie in het Torajagebied* (1913-1942), (Zoetermeer, Netherlands: Boekencentrum, 1993), 134, 159, 162, 164.



talked about history as a goal-oriented course of events. As a disciple of Christ, he preached the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the absolutely new event in human history (Acts 17:31). This provocative sermon did not cause any harm to Paul. But elsewhere he experienced persecution and imprisonment.

In Athens Paul did not destroy any of the many idols in the city. Boniface, known as ‘the apostle of the Germans’, however, did not follow Paul’s example in Athens. In 724 he provoked the Germans ‘by his courageous act in felling the sacred oak of Thor at Geismar in Hesse... The Germans were convinced that anyone who infringed the sacredness of the sanctuary would be destroyed by the gods... [but] nothing happened... With the wood of the tree Boniface built a chapel’. <sup>24</sup> At the time, this drastic action of Boniface and other less famous missionary ‘wood-cutters’ might seem acceptable, but not any more. Today, the example of Paul in Athens needs to be followed: no destruction of the images, idols or sanctuaries of other faiths in any situation. The burning of the Qur’an or the holy books of Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. proposed and even practised by some Christians, is totally contrary to the ethics of Paul and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As Paul’s speech was a profound peaceful response to the idols in Athens, so today’s Christians have to respond clearly and peaceably to contemporary religious and secular challenges, even when these challenges are characterised by violence and persecution. Following the recent burning of churches by Hindus in India and Muslims in Indonesia, Christians must not respond with retaliation, that is, with the burning of temples and mosques. At the same time, no pastor does wrong when he takes away idols from the houses of persons who convert to Christ – provided it’s with the consent of the converts involved.

Christians are called to avoid unnecessary provocation. To be clear: Christians have the freedom to eat what they like. But it is shown to be counter-productive when they eat meat in the company of Hindus, or eat pork in the company of Muslims. Adaptation and accommodation are part of all missionary strategy, but they have their limitations. It is questionable whether a pastor in public prayers at meetings attended by Muslims (weddings, funerals, etc.) is allowed to call God merely ‘the Almighty’ and not ‘the Father’, and to end his prayer without saying ‘We pray in Jesus’ name’. If he does not want to call God ‘the Father’ in front of Muslims, he neglects Paul’s advice: ‘Giving thanks to God *the Father* at all times and for everything *in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*’ (Eph. 5:20). In India other shibboleths exist. Some Christian women wear the [Hindu] *pottu* mark on their forehead, but other Christian women indicate that it is

---

<sup>24</sup> Neill, *A history of Christian missions*, 75.

unacceptable to wear the *pottu* mark after conversion to Jesus Christ as Lord.<sup>25</sup>

### **Avoidable and Unavoidable Persecution of Christians: A Crusading or Crucified Mind?**

It is not at all an easy matter following Jesus wholeheartedly. Jesus himself made his disciples aware of the consequences of being his followers: 'Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me' (Matt. 10:38).

The Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama distinguished between the 'crusading mind' (recalling the mediæval Crusades), and the 'crucified mind', that is, the mind shaped by the cross of Jesus Christ, or 'the foolishness and weakness of God'.<sup>26</sup> Christians who have a 'crusading mind' do not walk in Christ's way, provoke in a bad sense, or cause persecution which could otherwise be avoided. Whereas Christians with a 'crucified mind' who are close to the Crucified One provoke only in a good sense, and experience unavoidable persecution. This is sound theology of a twentieth-century Christian theologian in a minority situation.

Dana A. Schnittkind (pseudonym: Dana Lee Thomas) wrote a book on Christian missionaries, entitled *Crusaders for God* (1952).<sup>27</sup> This terminology is too much linked with the mediæval Crusades, on the one hand, and the author's living in a Christian majority situation, on the other, to be globally acceptable. In all six continents, Christians are wrong to use the term 'crusade' to describe and propagate the missionary obligation in today's setting. For that reason 'Campus Crusade for Christ' is an old-fashioned name, originating from Christians in a majority situation who did not take into account the situation of Christians in the Muslim world. Frances E. Arnold Foster came closer than Schnittkind to the truth in *Heralds of the cross* (1882):<sup>28</sup>

'Cross-bearers' may be the most adequate term to characterise Christians with 'a crucified (as opposed to a 'crusading') mind.' The idea that the term 'cross-bearers' is quite soft compared with 'crusaders', is totally wrong. In this case, a type of hardness different from the 'crusades' is at stake. The liberation theologians who time and again used the term 'cross-bearers', are

Copyrighted Material

<sup>25</sup> Dasan Jeyaraj, *Followers of Christ outside the church in Chennai, India: A socio-historical study of a non-church movement* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2010), 346-47.

<sup>26</sup> Kosuke Koyama, 'What makes a missionary? Toward crucified mind, not crusading mind,' in: Gerald H. Anderson & Thomas F. Stransky, *Crucial issues in mission today* (New York: Paulist Press, 1974), 117-32.

<sup>27</sup> Dana A. Schnittkind (pseudonym: Dana Lee Thomas), *Crusaders for God* (New York: A.A. Wyn, 1952).

<sup>28</sup> Frances E. Arnold-Foster, *Heralds of the cross: or, The fulfilling of the command: Chapters on missionary work* (London: Hatchards, 1882).

not at all soft people. The South African black theologian Takatso A. Mofokeng ended his monograph on Christians as cross-bearers as follows:

Christian existence as a life in faith, love, and hope shall be a militant one against anti-Christian forces and structures that are opposed to the emergence of the poor and the oppressed as inheritors of the earth and of a human community of equals. Their faith shall be faith against the destruction of faith, their love shall be love against hatred and bitterness, and their hope in the coming of the new society shall be 'hope against hope'.<sup>29</sup>

Although Koyama disagreed with the basic concepts of liberation theology, he consented with typifying Christians as 'cross-bearers'. Christians with a 'crucified mind', as opposed to fellow Christians with a 'crusading mind', are 'cross-bearers', who are more willing to be persecuted than being willing to persecute and torture other human beings.

Not only missionaries but all Christians are called to be 'cross-bearers'. Christians in a minority situation can never avoid taking up the cross and being cross-bearers. Christians in a majority setting also have the task of bearing the cross. First of all, they cannot equate living in a majority situation with 'heaven on earth'. Secularism and capitalism in western societies oppose the Gospel implicitly and explicitly. Secular mass media tend to neglect and ridicule basic Christian concerns. In addition, Christians in a majority situation belong to the same community of believers as Christians in a minority situation. Therefore they need to share the spiritual and physical sufferings of Christians sharing the minority situation. This implies a willingness to listen carefully to the messages of persecuted Christians. As Paul was brought up at the feet of the Pharisee Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), so Christians in a majority situation need to be willing to sit at the feet of Christians in a minority situation who daily experience discrimination and persecution.

In all continents Christians are called to suffer unavoidable, and to prevent avoidable, persecution. Clearly, they are first of all called to have a crucified mind, as opposed to a crusading mind which causes avoidable persecution. Secondly, they are called to pray regularly for persecuted Christians and underground churches. Thirdly, they are called to use the mass media and the social media for disseminating information about violations of religious freedom in general, and persecution in particular. And finally, they are called to take appropriate non-violent action.

### Final Observations

This chapter has dealt with the question: 'Do Christian witness and mission provoke persecution?' The summarising answer is 'yes and no'.

---

<sup>29</sup> Takatso A. Mofokeng, *The Crucified among the cross bearers: Towards a black Christology* (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok, 1983), 263.

‘Yes’ because the Christian message, ministry and mission are thoroughly provocative in a good sense. Therefore Jesus and his disciples were conscious that persecution and the cross cannot be avoided. Today, persecution is also a phenomenon that necessarily accompanies Christian witness and mission around the globe. But suffering and persecution are not an end in themselves. The establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, the new heaven and the new earth, are the ultimate goal of witness and mission. This provocative goal of desires and ambitions cannot be reached without pain, suffering, oppression, persecution and execution as an ultimate punishment. Martyrdom has taken place in all ages and in all continents. From the very beginning, the church universal has highly honoured its martyrs. Since Stephen (Acts 7:54-8:1), there have been cross-bearers who faithfully ended their lives in prison or martyrdom for Christ’s sake.

‘No’ because many persecutions past and present are deeply rooted in causes other than in the preaching, teaching and healing of sincere Christians. Many Hindus in India limit the freedom of religion or belief to the religions indigenous to India (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism), placing Christianity and Islam outside the pale. Saudi Arabia allows only Islam to manifest itself on its soil, making the Bible and the holy books of Hinduism and Buddhism contraband. And communist regimes view not only Christianity but all religions as ‘opium’ that must be eradicated.<sup>30</sup>

The ‘yes’ is more important than the ‘no’. The witness and mission of Christians in minority and majority situations remain to ‘lift Jesus Christ up’ to the total human community, enabling all human beings to see the crucified, risen and exalted Lord. This, clearly provocative, goal-setting is just what Jesus in the fourth Gospel commanded us to do: ‘Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life’ (John 3:14). As Moses made a bronze serpent, put it on a pole, and commanded the people of Israel who had sinned against the Lord to look at the serpent in order to be healed (Num. 21:4-9), so in today’s setting Christians and churches have the obligation to make known the name, person and work of Jesus Christ everywhere, and to invite the whole community to look to him as the Lord who grants forgiveness of sins and eternal life. As cross-bearers, Christians know that God’s final word is not the cross, but the resurrection. Persecution and the cross are pre-final; final is life eternal presented to the human community in the resurrection and exaltation of Lord Jesus Christ.

---

<sup>30</sup> Cf Paul Marshall, *Their blood cries out: The worldwide tragedy of modern Christians who are dying for their faith* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1997); Paul Marshall (general ed), *Religious freedom in the world: A global report on freedom and persecution* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000).

# THE MISSIONARY WITNESS OF THE PERSECUTED AND THE MARTYRS

Tite Tiénou

## Introduction

Christians have encountered suffering, persecution and death since the earliest days of the church's existence. In the book of Acts, Luke describes how the death of Stephen by stoning and 'a great persecution against the church at Jerusalem' occurred (Acts 7:54-8:3). This 'great persecution' resulted in the believers in Christ being scattered. As Luke continues telling the story, he states that the scattered believers spoke 'the message' to Jews in Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch and to Greeks in Antioch (Acts 11:19-21). Thus, from the very beginning, persecution and missionary witness can be linked. The suffering, persecution and death of Christians are not, however, only historical phenomena and limited to less 'enlightened' times. These phenomena occur in contemporary societies on a daily basis.<sup>1</sup>

The current reality of violence and persecution, often for religious reasons, raises significant theological, missiological and practical questions and issues for Christians. Many of these issues are addressed elsewhere in this volume. In the light of the foregoing, this chapter focuses on an enquiry about the nature of the missionary witness of persecuted Christians and martyrs. Enquiring about the missionary witness of the persecuted and the martyrs presupposes that we establish a framework of understanding. For the purposes of this chapter, addressing the following two questions will help toward that understanding: Who are the persecuted and the martyrs? How can suffering become 'a mode of missionary engagement'? Let us now turn to matters related to the first question.

Copyrighted Material

---

<sup>1</sup> There is ample documentation available on the reality of suffering, persecution and martyrdom as they relate to Christian mission. See, for example, W.D. Taylor, A. van der Meer and R. Reimer (eds), *Sorrow and Blood: Christian Mission in Contexts of Suffering, Persecution, and Martyrdom* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2012), and T.M. Johnson, G.A. Zurlo, A.W. Hickman, and P.F. Crossing, 'Christianity 2015: Religious Diversity and Personal Context', in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 39.1 (January 2015), 28-29. Line 24 (29) provides a numerical table of Christian martyrs per annum. The 2015 report on the state of Global Christianity is the thirty-first annual statistical documentation published in the *IBMR*, every year in January.

### Who are the Persecuted and the Martyrs?

In paragraph 13, 'Freedom and Persecution', the Lausanne Covenant notes the certainty of persecution for Christians: 'We do not forget the warnings of Jesus that persecution is inevitable.'<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the certainty of persecution has always been part of the experience of Christ's witnesses. Christians, however, do not constitute the only group suffering persecution. As a fact of human life, persecution takes many forms and affects people in nearly all societies, regardless of religious affiliation. Nevertheless, for the sake of clarity, in this chapter, *persecution*, when endured by Christians, is defined as 'any unjust action of varying levels of hostility perpetrated on the basis of religion and directed at Christians, resulting in varying levels of harm as it is considered from the victim's perspective.'<sup>3</sup> *The persecuted* are, in the light of this definition, believers in Christ who experience hostility, violence and suffering for the sake of Christ.

Martyrdom, like persecution, occurs in all religious communities. For a believer in Christ, 'martyrdom is voluntarily, but without deliberate provocation by the victim, losing one's life to those hostile to the faith in proclamation or defense of Judeo-Christian belief'.<sup>4</sup> *The martyrs* are, therefore, 'believers in Christ who have lost their lives prematurely, in situations of witness, as a result of human hostility'.<sup>5</sup>

Since suffering occurs when violence and hostility are directed at the persecuted and the martyrs, can suffering be a factor in Christian mission? If so, what is it?

### Suffering as a Mode of Missionary Involvement

Missiologists, and Christians in general, are aware of the reality that Christian mission takes place in a world of violence, suffering and death. They are paying more attention to Christian responses to suffering, violence, international security and Christian witness in a world of religious diversity, as evidenced in publications and statements. In June 2011 the World Council of Churches, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the World Evangelical Alliance issued the joint statement

<sup>2</sup> 'The Lausanne Covenant' in J.D. Douglas (ed), *Let the Earth Hear His Voice* (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications, 1975), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Charles L. Tieszen, 'Redefining Persecution', in Taylor, van der Meer and Reimer (eds), *Sorrow and Blood*, 47.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas J. Wespetal, 'Martyrdom and the Furtherance of God's Plan: The Value of Dying for the Christian Faith' (PhD Dissertation, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2005), 40. Wespetal's definition of martyrdom is akin to the one provided in D.B. Barrett, G.T. Kurian and T.M. Johnson (eds), *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2nd edition (Oxford: OUP, 2001), 665.

<sup>5</sup> T.M. Johnson 'Martyrdom' in John Currie (ed), *Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundations* (Nottingham, UK, and Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 220.

'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct'.<sup>6</sup> In 2012 a collection of essays, *Sorrow and Blood: Christian Mission in Contexts of Suffering, Persecution, and Death* was published under the auspices of the World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission. In 2004 *Religion and Security: The New Nexus in International Relations*, another collection of essays, was published. Two other publications deserve mention: Isaiah Majok Dau's *Suffering and God: A Theological Reflection on the War in Sudan*, published in 2002, and the 2004 Brandywine Leadership Forums devoted to 'Global Suffering: Rethinking the Christian Response'.<sup>7</sup> These developments are encouraging signs that many Christians are ready to face the reality that, in the words of Ambassador Robert A. Seiple, 'the Christian faith more than suggests that a proper relationship with the God of History and the Christ of Calvary involves suffering. Suffering is unavoidable'.<sup>8</sup> Yet, the question remains: Can Christians, missiologists and mission practitioners incorporate suffering into their theology and practice of mission? This question must be asked, not because one knows the answer, but because of the challenges that Christians in general, and missiologists in particular, face as they endeavour to make 'suffering... a mode of missionary involvement'.<sup>9</sup> These challenges are related, in part, to William D. Taylor's observation that 'multifaceted persecution unleashes its violence against Christians in many areas of the world, yet ironically, we discover that we have a deficient theology of martyrdom and suffering'.<sup>10</sup> The way forward in developing a more adequate 'theology of martyrdom and suffering' is, I suggest, to really make suffering 'a mode of missionary engagement'.

My interest in the place of suffering in mission theology and practice goes back to the 1990s. In the chapter I contributed to the book *Missiological Education for the 21st Century* entitled 'The Training of Missiologists for an African Context',<sup>11</sup> I suggested, at the time, that missiologists would need to reflect more on suffering, especially when their focus is Africa. In the light of Kwame Bediako's astonishment that there 'had been so little reflection in African Christian thought so far, on the

---

<sup>6</sup> The text of the document can be read in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35.4 (October 2011), 195-97.

<sup>7</sup> Papers from these forums were published by *The Brandywine Review of Faith and International Affairs*, 2.3 (Winter 2004-05).

<sup>8</sup> *The Brandywine Review of Faith and International Affairs*, 2.3, 2.

<sup>9</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 180.

<sup>10</sup> William D. Taylor 'From Iguassu to the reflective practitioners of the global family of Christ', in William D. Taylor (ed), *Global Missiology for the 21st Century: The Iguassu Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 3.

<sup>11</sup> T. Tiénou, 'The Training of Missiologists for an African Context', in J.D. Woodberry, C. Van Engen and E.J. Elliston (eds), *Missiological Education for the 21st Century: The Book, the Circle and the Sandals* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 93-100.



African collective experience of suffering',<sup>12</sup> I asked the question: 'Could it be that a certain triumphalist missiology has successfully marginalised the theology of the cross and suffering?'<sup>13</sup> Triumphalist missiology, both in theory and in practice, makes it difficult to fully recognise the fact that 'the acceptance of suffering in following Jesus is, in the final analysis, an expression of obedient confidence in God'.<sup>14</sup>

Today, with the recognition that hostility, violence and suffering are not limited to Africa, what I wrote in 1996 needs to be reassessed in the light of the following two aspects of the present situation. On the one hand, the triumphalist missiology I had in mind then has not disappeared. On the other hand, theologians and missiologists have produced more work on suffering. With the foregoing in mind and in the light of David Bosch's remark (mentioned above), and the present reality of violence and suffering in the world, my reassessment will explore the challenges and the prospects of incorporating suffering in the crafting of mission theology and practice. What are the challenges related to making 'suffering a mode of missionary involvement'?

I contend that, in spite of their renewed interest in suffering and mission, missiologists and mission practitioners who want to make suffering a mode of missionary involvement face multiple challenges. These challenges are of two kinds: some are related to theology and others are linked with mission practice. I will first review challenges related to theology.

I will use observations made by Lesslie Newbigin and Klaus Bockmühl as starting-points for my review of the challenges related to theology. Both observations were made in the 1980s. In 1989 Newbigin wrote that he had:

hoped that a rethinking will lead to a correction of a defect that seems to me to be present in the whole debate about the missionary message during the past century. It has all been terribly Pelagian. Whether the emphasis was upon the saving of individual souls from perdition, or on the shaping of more truly human cultures, or on the righting of social wrongs, the overwhelming emphasis has been upon missions as our programme.<sup>15</sup>

Klaus Bockmühl, in an essay entitled 'God and Other 'Forgotten Factors' in Theology' published in 1982 in *Christianity Today*, observed the following: 'Theology today seems to be in the process of replacing sin and grace with rich and poor as the basic polarity of biblical thought.'<sup>16</sup>

Copyrighted Material

<sup>12</sup> Kwame Bediako, 'Urgent Questions Concerning Christianity in Africa: Some Reflections on a Manifesto' (unpublished paper, 1992), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Tiénou, *Missiological Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 98.

<sup>14</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission, Volume 2: Paul and the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL; IVP / Leicester, UK: Apollos, 2004), 1537.

<sup>15</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, 'Mission in the 1990s: Two Views', in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 13.3 (July 1989), 102.

<sup>16</sup> Klaus Bockmühl, 'God and Other "Forgotten Factors" in Theology', in *Christianity Today* (19th February 1982), 48.



One does not have to agree totally with every detail of the ideas expressed by Newbigin and Bockmühl. Their observations merit attention because there is a ring of truth about them. Who, in Christian circles, has not heard instances of over-confidence in missionary ranks? In the case of evangelicals, what evangelical mission-minded person is not aware of the so-called 10/40 Window, and of the link that that window makes between poverty and the need for missionising?<sup>17</sup> Whatever one may think, the Pelagian penchant in mission can, and does, prevent us from thinking and doing mission in weakness – and with the expectation that Christian witnesses will encounter suffering, persecution, and even death.

Moreover, when and where the ‘rich and poor polarity’ becomes dominant ‘love can deteriorate into patronising charity’ and ‘compassion and solidarity can be replaced by pity and condescension’.<sup>18</sup> In such situations, we can comfort ourselves in thinking that suffering is normal for the ‘poor’, and they are the object of ‘our’ mission.

These, then, are two major theological challenges in mission thought and practice that hinder the incorporation of suffering into mission theology. As it is already apparent, these theological themes have practical implications. To them we now turn.

As in the theological challenges above, I will mention two basic challenges. I hasten to say that these matters are more in the category of ‘unexamined assumptions’ than they are ‘sins of commission’. I state them as: 1) Power and prestige are requirements in mission and 2) The blinding effect of optimism.

On the place of power and prestige in mission practice, Newbigin notes that ‘for 400 years the major thrust of Christian missions – Catholic and Protestant – has been bound up with the expanding economic and political power of Europe and North America’.<sup>19</sup> For me, the net effect of this is twofold: first, we have yet to be convinced that mission can really be done from a base of powerlessness! I note, in passing, that even missionaries from ‘weak nations’ tend to adopt the attitudes of mission from a position of power. Secondly, when we are accustomed to power and prestige, we can be led to believe that suffering is exceptional (and perhaps mostly the lot of those less fortunate). As Hugo Zorilla recounts, a missionary once told him: ‘I have never had to suffer. Mama Mission has always gotten me out of any tight situation that might occur.’<sup>20</sup> How can people with this kind of experience and expectation really incorporate suffering into their mission theology and practice?

<sup>17</sup> See the Handbook of the AD 2000 Movement: *AD 2000 and Beyond*, published in 1992, 3, 4 (where this link is explicit).

<sup>18</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 296.

<sup>19</sup> Newbigin, ‘Mission in the 1990s: Two Views’, 100.

<sup>20</sup> Hugo Zorilla, ‘Mission and Suffering: A Camouflaged Truth’, in *Direction*, 22.1 (Spring 1993), 73: [www.directionjournal.org/article/?789](http://www.directionjournal.org/article/?789).

As for the blinding effect of optimism on mission theology and practice, it is not necessary to provide examples. Missiologists and mission practitioners are familiar with various plans for completing the task of world evangelisation. Annual statistics are available on this. For instance, the 'Status of Global Christianity, 2015, in the Context of 1900-2050', line 69, estimates that there will be 2,300 plans for world evangelisation in mid-2015.<sup>21</sup>

All in all, Bockmühl was right: 'Forgetfulness concerning God is the signature of our time.'<sup>22</sup> And when people forget God, they have no good perspective on either the human condition or on suffering.

In the light of the foregoing, what are the prospects for incorporating suffering into Christian mission theology and practice? It is not enough that we understand the reality that mission occurs in contexts of violence, suffering and death. It is not enough that we know and confess that Scripture teaches the inevitability of persecution and martyrdom. For suffering to become 'a mode of missionary involvement', Christians must take to heart these warnings uttered by John Bright: 'The church whose calling is easy is no church and no agent of the Gospel of redemption... Whoever, therefore, offers us the victory of Christ at a minimum of inconvenience to ourselves, has suggested the worship of a false God.'<sup>23</sup> Ongoing suffering, persecution and martyrdom remind us that the calling of the church is not easy. The persecuted and the martyrs, in enduring much 'inconvenience to themselves' are 'agents of the Gospel of redemption'. But what is their witness?

### What is the Missionary Witness of the Persecuted and the Martyrs?

The missionary witness of the persecuted and the martyrs is, I suggest, their very lives. These demonstrate the truth of God's good news. That is, the way the persecuted and the martyrs live, suffer and die for the sake of the Gospel of Christ is a powerful witness. They are a reminder to Christians, and non-Christians, that 'people are not only persuaded by the triumphs of Christianity, but also by its trials'.<sup>24</sup> In their vulnerability and weakness, the persecuted and the martyrs have no possibility of making and implementing plans for mission and evangelisation. So the testimony of their lives is they magnify the glory and the grace of God.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 39.1 (January 2015), 29.

<sup>22</sup> Bockmühl, 'God and Other "Forgotten Factors" in Theology', 48.

<sup>23</sup> John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1953), 269.

<sup>24</sup> Allan Anderson, 'Pentecostal Pneumatology and African Power Concepts: Continuity or Change?' in *Missionalia* 19.1, 73.

<sup>25</sup> Alan Kreider ('Violence and Mission in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries: Lessons for Today' in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 31.3 [July 2007], 125-27), and Einer Molland ('L'antiquité chrétienne a-t-elle eu un programme et des méthodes missionnaires?' in *Opuscula Patristica* (Bibliotheca Theologica Norvegica

The persecuted and the martyrs offer Christians lessons on the basics of suffering in the human condition and the basics regarding suffering in biblical revelation. When Christians return to basics about suffering in the human condition, both in the present world and in history, they will have to accept *the reality of suffering as normal* in human societies from Genesis 3 until the end of this age. The acceptance of this reality can create, I think, a different and healthier mindset as Christians engage in mission. They will think less of suffering as something exceptional or as something to be explained.<sup>26</sup> Instead, they might seek ways to learn important lessons through suffering. For us as Christians, suffering can be a mark of legitimacy, with the corollary that the absence of suffering may be a sign of illegitimacy (Heb. 12:4-10). As the writer to the Hebrews reminds his readers, 'son though he was, he [Jesus Christ] learned obedience in the school of suffering' (Heb. 5:9 New English Bible). I have had the privilege of being a witness of this reality in my parents' journey as Christ's followers and church life in Burkina Faso. One specific example will suffice. In the late 1970s, severe persecution was inflicted upon Christians in a village in south-western Burkina Faso. The situation came to a crisis point on Easter Sunday in 1978. In my role as one of the leaders of the denomination to which the local church belonged, I was asked to help the Christians deal with the situation. God, in his grace and mercy, helped us chart a path for the Christians to accept suffering without retaliation or the threat of revenge. Today, after all these years, the church is still functioning in the village.

Since I have already alluded to suffering in Scripture, let me continue and make my thoughts on suffering in biblical revelation more explicit. I take Manfred T. Brauch's observation as my overall framework. He writes:

From the beginning to the end of the biblical witness, the cognitive and experiential dissonance – dissonance between God's good purposes (on the one hand) and the reality of evil and suffering (on the other) – is front and center... [From Genesis 3 onwards we see] the rebellion of the first human pair and its inevitable result: life marked by pain, sorrow and suffering. For when human life is separated from the Giver and Sustainer of life, it cannot be whole as intended by God.<sup>27</sup>

---

[Bibliotheca Theologica Norvegica, 2]), 103-54), remind us of how the early Christians 'proclaimed' the Gospel by the quality of their lives.

<sup>26</sup>Manfred T. Brauch reminds us of two perils besetting Christians in this area. He says, 'First I assumed that the issue of suffering could be cognitively dissected... The second faulty assumption was that a faithful study of the biblical texts would yield satisfying truths, and that divinely revealed insights would unambiguously enlighten our understanding.' He then states what everyone who has suffered knows: 'Suffering is primarily an experiential reality, not a cognitive rational one.' In 'How Long, O Lord? A Theological Perspective on Suffering', in *The Brandywine Review of Faith and International Affairs*, 2.3 (Winter 2004), 11-17.

<sup>27</sup> Brauch, 'How Long, O Lord?', 12.

If Brauch is right, what do we learn from Scripture about what to do with this reality and our own suffering? There are, of course, multiple answers to this question. For our purposes here, I offer the following four points made by Robert A. Seiple: 1) 'Suffering refocuses the mind from the temporary to the eternal', 2) 'Suffering creates a relationship with God', 3) 'Suffering deepens our faith', and 4) 'Suffering provides us with a constant reminder that it did not have to be this way'.<sup>28</sup>

Obviously, Seiple's four lessons cannot happen apart from Christians being deeply nurtured by other truths found in Scripture. I draw attention to two of these truths from Paul's writings: 'All I care is to know Christ, to experience the power of his resurrection, and to share his sufferings, in growing conformity with his death' (Phil. 3:10-11a NEB), and 'You have been granted the privilege not only of believing in Christ but also of suffering for him' (Phil. 1:29 NEB).

The persecuted and the martyrs, today as in the past, are powerful demonstrations of the truths we find in Paul's writings and the teaching of Jesus. But, how does 'suffering for Christ' contribute to mission and the advance of God's reign? In my opinion, in and by themselves, suffering, persecution and martyrdom do not bring about growth for the Christian faith. To be sure, Christian advance sometimes takes place after major persecution has been directed at Christians. In other instances, the suffering, persecution and martyrdom of Christians have achieved the results intended by the perpetrators of such violence. The suffering inflicted on Christians, in such instances, succeeds in compromising the advance of the Christian faith. One can find examples of either effect in the history of the Christian church and in contemporary situations. Ultimately, the missionary witness of the persecuted and the martyrs lies in the manner in which they have endured suffering as it was being inflicted on them.

## Conclusion

In the long history of the church in mission, persecuted Christians and martyrs have demonstrated that it is possible to put Paul's words in practice. Their obedience to Christ, in suffering and in death, and how they endure persecution and martyrdom constitute their missionary witness.

Copyrighted Material

---

<sup>28</sup>Robert A. Seiple, 'The Hidden Faces of Suffering', in *The Brandywine Review of Faith and International Affairs*, 2.3 (Winter 2004), 5-6.

# CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY IN THE FACE OF DISCRIMINATION AND PERSECUTION

Christof Sauer

Christian solidarity is intuitively a response to the countless infringements on freedom of belief recorded in the previous chapters. This chapter will take three approaches: a theological, a practical and a structural approach. First, it will reflect on the theological basis for Christian solidarity in the face of discrimination and persecution. Next, it will make some suggestions for the internal praxis of the church and its witness towards the world. Finally, it will look at the usefulness of global Christian structures for such solidarity. The subject will be developed in the form of propositions, some of which will be substantiated in more detail. They emanate from critical reflection and experience.<sup>1</sup>

## **Theological Foundations: Unity in Affliction as a Task and a Witness**

To what extent does Christian unity in the face of oppression represent a missionary witness to the world? In what way do various forms of disunity in the face of oppression weaken Christian witness to the world? And how do different ways of expressing Christian solidarity strengthen missionary witness?

### *Christian Unity in the Face of Affliction is a Witness to the World*

Jesus' intercessory prayer connects the oppression of Christians at the hands of the world, the evil one and the mission of Christians in the world with the unity of those who believe in Christ (cf. John 17:14-15; 18:20-23). In the face of the hatred of the world, the unity of Christians sent into the world in order to share the word of God is considered to be a fruitful witness that triggers faith.

Copyrighted Material

From church history we learn about experiences of Christian unity beyond confessional boundaries in the face of persecution and of the impact this witness of Christian unity has had.

The fact of Christians taking a stand in unity in situations of persecution is in itself a witness to their Christian faith. It testifies to the strength of their faith to overcome that which usually separates people. In situations of

---

<sup>1</sup> For a more extensive exploration in German, see C. Sauer, *Martyrium und Mission* (Erlangen: Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene, 2015).

oppression and persecution, it is necessary to establish the greatest possible Christian unity because it strengthens the witness and the standing of the church of Christ, when churches of different confessions, denominations, languages, ethnic backgrounds and nationalities speak with one voice, and take a stand for one another when one of them is being oppressed or attacked.

Similarly, solidarity with the persecuted in other places beyond denominational boundaries by those who are less oppressed is in itself a witness to the Christian faith. The less persecuted are in this way confessing the mystery of the one body of Christ and 'the fellowship of the saints' which stretches across time, across the inhabited world, as well as across great diversity and historical divisions.

Remembering the 'cloud of witnesses' (cf. Heb. 12:1), whose faith was steadfast under persecution, has the inherent power to kindle faith, because in view of their life stories and martyrdom, the question is evoked as to what kind of treasure could have been more important to these people than their own lives, and what gave them the strength to endure. From the beginning, the oral reports of the eyewitnesses of martyrdoms have challenged their listeners to consider the faith witnessed to by these martyrs. The Christian martyrologies which were recorded soon thereafter can be considered as a missionary witness from this perspective.

### *Christian Disunity in the Face of Persecution Weakens Christian Witness to the World*

Christian division is an anti-witness. Dissociation from other Christians and among denominations in the face of oppression, supposedly to protect oneself from persecution, weakens the position of Christians in general, as well as their witness to the world.

Betrayal and denunciation of other Christian groups to totalitarian regimes, in the face of attempts by these regimes to totally dominate churches and religions, undermine the credibility of those Christians and churches.

The demands of totalitarian systems towards churches and religions, and their attempts at enforcing conformity, can lead to a *casus confessionis*. In this extreme case, a separation between true and false church at the expense of unity is probably inevitable. It is difficult to come to an agreement concerning the limits of a *casus confessionis* and the freedom of conscience in view of the divergent reactions of individual Christians and church leadership to the demands of a totalitarian government. Divisions among Christians due to their different reactions to persecution weaken their witness and absorb their energy. Christian groups, in spite of ethical latitude, should follow the principles to be slow to judge divergent decisions by other Christians, not to let themselves be divided, and to give

nothing higher priority in the church than the authority of God and the *norma normans* (the norm of norms which cannot be normed) of his word.

Exclusion, oppression and persecution among different Christian groups – especially with the help of the state authorities – are an extremely negative witness to the world. A lack of solidarity by the less oppressed with the more severely persecuted in other places weakens Christian witness altogether.

### *Expressions of Solidarity Strengthen Witness in the Face of Persecution*

Those suffering acute persecution could be encouraged in their faith and witness by remembering they are part of a great fellowship of suffering with Christians all over the world (1 Pet. 5:9; 1 Cor. 12:26). Solidarity with their contemporaries in the body of Christ, which may be expressed by the exchange of information, visits, prayers, support, empathy, and by rejoicing with them, has the potential to strengthen missionary witness on both ends.

Well-functioning communication is the first prerequisite in order to be able to have empathy with the suffering of others. For this reason, a lively worldwide exchange of information in the face of oppression is important among the various members of the body of Christ and the various churches respectively.

Solidarity in intercession strengthens the missionary impact of the persecuted, and that of the intercessors, because God's power is released in intercession and encourages discouraged messengers of the faith who are burdened beyond their own strength and have lost all hope of surviving persecution (cf. 2 Cor. 1:8, 11 and Phil. 1:19). Intercession in solidarity should be based on the sovereignty of God and focused on the expansion of the Kingdom of God (cf. Acts 4:24-30; Eph. 6:19-20; 1 Tim. 2:1-6).

In this first section we have argued that unity in affliction is both a task and a witness: Christian unity in the face of affliction is a witness to the world. Christian disunity in the face of persecution weakens Christian witness to the world and should therefore be avoided. Expressions of solidarity strengthen the witness of the church in the face of persecution. Based on these foundational insights, it is time to explore what this means for internal Christian praxis.

Copyrighted Material

## **The Praxis of the Church Within**

### *Advocacy with a Genuinely Christian Profile*

The advocacy of Christians and churches in the face of oppression, persecution and martyrdom should be doxologically oriented<sup>2</sup> and bring the

<sup>2</sup> See, in this volume, C. Sauer, 'A doxological framework for interpreting

sovereignty of God into view. It should further aim at the proclamation of the Gospel and the spread of the Kingdom of God. Finally, it should be expressed in a genuinely and uniquely Christian way. Christian prayer in all its forms plays an important part here.

Christian advocacy for the persecuted must not be influenced by any kind of antagonistic stereotypes, but it may definitely be connected with apologetics. This excludes any form of retaliation and revenge at a human level. Nor should this Christian advocacy be influenced primarily by political commitment. In my view, it appears to be legitimate to discern the incompatibility or limited compatibility of certain worldviews with the Christian faith, and also to represent the same in public. It is equally legitimate to represent political views – as long as it is understood that they differ in nature from final realities – e.g. to believe that genuine democracy is the most effective framework for religious freedom. In that sense, any form of ‘anti-ideology’, e.g. ‘anti-communism’ or ‘Islamophobia’, would not meet Christian standards, if they were to be made the basis of Christian advocacy for the persecuted.

It is legitimate for Christians to give priority to advocacy for their persecuted fellow believers, even though it is imperative to equally intervene for the religious freedom of non-Christians (Heb. 13:3; Gal. 6:9-10). One rationale for this is that the relationship created by Christ among the members of his body is closer and has a deeper dimension than the connection with all humans as being equally created in the image of God. In addition, advocacy for persecuted Christians keeps in mind that, as Christians, we have the joint task of proclaiming the Gospel to the world.

### *Liturgical Practice*

The central issues of the faith are reflected in the liturgical practice of the church – at least, they ought to be. As the way of the cross and solidarity with the persecuted belong to the central tenets of the Christian faith, they also ought to be part of the liturgical practice of the church. From this perspective we shall briefly discuss some exemplary opportunities: special days of prayer for persecuted Christians, sermons, and liturgical intercession.

Copyrighted Material

#### DAYS OF COMMEMORATION AND PRAYER

Every congregation should regularly – at least once a year – remember oppressed and persecuted Christians, intercede for them and learn from their spiritual insights. It would be desirable that an entire church service be



dedicated to this topic or even all church events during that week. There are various liturgies on offer for such church services.<sup>3</sup>

## SERMONS

In churches that have a set text for their Sunday sermons, care should be taken to take proper note of the topic of oppression and persecution where it occurs. The topic should be interpreted in view of its relevance for the present reality of the global church and one's own practice of courageous faith. It should definitely neither be omitted nor treated as a matter of the past.

On special days of prayer for the persecuted church, one should take the liberty to choose a more suitable text than the standard pericope.<sup>4</sup> But even throughout the year, wherever suitable, current situations of persecution might be referred to in sermons. Sermons offer a particularly good opportunity to express a willingness to learn from persecuted Christians. Christians – particularly in the West – need to encounter the persecuted in order to regain deep spiritual insights into discipleship of Christ.<sup>5</sup>

## INTERCESSORY PRAYER

Intercession for the persecuted on special days of prayer should be undergirded with sufficient and relevant information. Regular intercessory prayer in every church service offers an opportunity to at least summarily remember the persecuted. This offers an opportunity to pick up the latest incidents. Such an example has the potential to motivate individual intercessory practice. Liturgical forms and prayers of persecuted Christians<sup>6</sup> could also be used.

Church prayer groups which concentrate on persecution could also have a part in the preparation of general intercession. Such intercessory prayer should not be understood as prayer for the persecuted only, but also as prayer with the persecuted. Intercession is mutual, for more severely

<sup>3</sup> Cf Y.C. DeAcutis Taylor, 'A service of thoughtful prayer for the persecuted church', in W.D. Taylor, T. van der Meer and R. Reimer (eds), *Sorrow and blood* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2012), 482-88.

<sup>4</sup> The following passages are recommended, among others: Luke 21:12-15; Heb. 10:33-39; 1 Pet. 2:13-17; Matt. 5:10-16; 2 Thess. 1:3-12; Gal. 1:23-24; Mark 10:29-30; 2 Cor. 2:9-10; Rom. 8:35-39; John 15:18-21; Acts 16:13-14.

<sup>5</sup> Cf R. Boyd-MacMillan, 'What can we learn from the persecuted?' in *Faith that endures* (Grand Rapids, MI: 2006), 303-21.

<sup>6</sup> Cf D.W.H. Arnold and R. Hudson, *Beyond belief: What the martyrs said to God* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2002); also 'The Lord's prayer for the persecuted', in P. Sookhdeo (ed), *The persecuted church* (Lausanne Occasional Paper 32, 2005): [www.lausanne.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/06/LOP32\\_IG3.pdf](http://www.lausanne.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/06/LOP32_IG3.pdf)

persecuted Christians also pray for less oppressed Christians who are exposed instead to other temptations.

The content of prayers for the oppressed and persecuted should focus on the sovereignty of God and the spreading of his kingdom (Acts 2:29). This also includes intercession for the persecutors, people in public responsibility and for peaceful living conditions (1 Tim. 2:1-6).

Intercession should be the first Christian reaction to persecution and reports about it, and cannot be replaced by anything else. It is neither the last resort after all other means have been exhausted nor is it only a complementary measure in addition to other activities. Conversely, prayer does not replace other Christian action.

Overall liturgical practices, even beyond sermons and intercessory prayer, should be examined regarding their relevance in responding to persecution. This includes all elements of the church service such as hymns, appropriate readings, mention of martyrs in the liturgy and collections, as well as the dimensions of martyrdom in the theology of Lord's Supper and baptism.<sup>7</sup>

In summary, regarding a Christian response within the bounds of the church to persecution, it is essential that this response is shaped by a genuinely Christian profile. Essential elements are found in liturgical practice, among which are special days of prayer for persecuted Christians, sermons and liturgical intercession. This forms a proper basis for advocacy outside the bounds of the church.

### Public Theology and Praxis

Naturally, the praxis of the church within and its witness towards the world cannot be neatly separated in every detail, and some of the criteria mentioned above already contain an external dimension. This section will deal mainly with the following questions: What should be the attitude among those engaged in supporting persecuted Christians elsewhere? What are the consequences of the insights into martyrdom and persecution for advocacy for religious freedom as a human right? What are the consequences for diaconal praxis directed towards the oppressed and persecuted, on the one hand, and for missionary praxis on the other?

Copyrighted Material

#### *Relationships among those Engaged in Advocacy*

A good relationship among those engaged in advocacy for oppressed and persecuted Christians needs to be cultivated for the sake of those affected and the greater good. This applies to co-operation among the churches,

---

<sup>7</sup> Cf C. Sauer (ed), *Bad Urach Statement: Towards an evangelical theology of suffering, persecution and martyrdom* (Bonn: VKW, 2010), § 4.5 'Practical applications for the local church'.

their co-operation with church-related and para-church organisations, as well as to the relationships of para-church agencies among each other.

#### RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CHURCHES AND PARA-CHURCH AGENCIES

In spite of all variety and differences in approach, those engaged in advocacy should find a common platform and nurture it. They should emphasise their complementarity and act in concert. Church-related and para-church organisations have expertise on this complex subject matter, of which the churches should make use. In view of the waning attractiveness of institutions, networking should be emphasised.

#### RELATIONSHIPS AMONG THE AGENCIES

Para-church organisations should overcome any potential competition and isolation which may have developed over time. It is important that such organisations be engaged in exchange, both within a denominational and in an ecumenical framework. On a national level, Religious Liberty Commissions of the Evangelical Alliance serve as an example of co-operation. For the international level, see the last section of this chapter.

#### AN ETHICS CODE FOR ADVOCACY ON BEHALF OF THE PERSECUTED

Those engaged in advocacy ought to jointly develop professional standards and a code of ethics. Since advocacy for oppressed and persecuted Christians involves various risks, potential mistakes and temptations, those involved ought to encourage one another in a fraternal way in order to establish a professional attitude in conformity with the Gospel, one which is beneficial to those who are affected.

The joint statement issued in 2011 by Ecumenicals, Roman Catholics and Evangelicals on 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World. Recommendations for Conduct', serves as a prototype for the procedure and spirit of arriving at such a document.<sup>8</sup> The annually updated document, 'Best Practices for Ministry to and with the Persecuted Church' of the Religious Liberty Partnership, can serve as an example and guideline for such codes of ethics on a national basis.<sup>9</sup> At least eight aspects need to be taken into consideration: co-operation and partnership, damage control, a willingness to learn and further educate co-workers, integrity in

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world> – see Troll and Schirmacher on 'Mission and Ethics of Mission 2014' in this volume for background.

<sup>9</sup> Cf Religious Liberty Partnership, *Best Practices for Ministry to and with the Persecuted Church*: [www.rlppartnership.org](http://www.rlppartnership.org).

communication, a willingness to be accountable to one another, forms of advocacy for oppressed and persecuted, work strategies and the soliciting for finances, as mentioned above. Such an ethics code should be based on deep theological and ethical reflection.

### *Advocacy for Religious Freedom as a Human Right*

The problem of religious freedom must not be considered exclusively from a narrow domestic perspective by the churches in the West. One needs to be aware of the global reality where religious freedom is at stake in a context dominated by a non-Christian religion or worldview.

The right to religious freedom needs to be defended as a prominent and primary human right.<sup>10</sup> Advocacy for human rights by the church should never lose sight of this right and may legitimately emphasise it. After all, it is religious freedom that gives the church the opportunity to act. This can even be argued from a secular perspective: wherever religious freedom is preserved, other human rights are usually safeguarded as well.<sup>11</sup> In addition, there is a strong overlap between religious freedom on the one hand, and the basic rights of freedom of opinion, conscience, the press and assembly on the other hand. Christian advocacy for human rights, and thus also for religious freedom, emanates theologically first of all from man being created in the image of God, and also from the God-given gift of conscience.

Whoever is involved in the advocacy for religious freedom of Christians should do the same for adherents of other religions and worldviews.

An essential component of religious freedom is the right to free expression of one's faith convictions and the attempt to persuade others thereof. For this reason, the church particularly needs to defend missionary activity as a human right – even in the face of the denigration of mission, restrictions on mission, and demands to cease any missionary activities among non-Christians. Missionary activity, or the freedom to engage in missionary activity, could simply be called a human right.<sup>12</sup>

The interventions of the church would fall short of her full potential and would not exhaust her commission if her advocacy for oppressed and persecuted Christians were to take place exclusively in the framework of religious freedom and human rights. Advocacy exclusively concentrating on international law or other legal norms would not address phenomena which from a theological perspective can legitimately be called persecution

---

<sup>10</sup> Cf Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

<sup>11</sup> Cf B.J. Grim and R. Finke, *The price of freedom denied: Religious persecution in the 21st century* (New York: 2010); B.J. Grim, 'Religious freedom and social wellbeing: A critical appraisal', in *IJRF* 2.1 (2009), 37-46.

<sup>12</sup> H. Bielefeldt, *Freedom of Religion or Belief* (Bonn: VKW, 2014), 117: [www.bucer.org/uploads/tx\\_org/Heiner\\_Bielefeldt\\_-\\_Freedom\\_of\\_Religion\\_or\\_Belief.pdf](http://www.bucer.org/uploads/tx_org/Heiner_Bielefeldt_-_Freedom_of_Religion_or_Belief.pdf)

and require a spiritual response. This includes most incidents not involving physical violence, such as mockery, mobbing or disinheritance by the family.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, a theological perspective which goes beyond religious freedom and human rights is imperative. However, both perspectives can complement one another in church advocacy. Depending on the situation, at times only one or the other need be chosen.

Church advocacy for religious freedom and human rights needs to be combined with a spiritually founded empathy with the suffering of the body of Christ in the world and one's own willingness to suffer for Christ.<sup>14</sup> In advocacy for persecuted Christians, spiritual and human rights concerns need to be combined. It needs to be accepted if such Christians, out of spiritual or missionary motives, request that we do not advocate on their behalf.

Legitimate methods of intervention for persecuted Christians are manifold. The appropriate measures to be taken by the church need to be carefully discerned in each case.<sup>15</sup>

The churches need to be aware of other actual or potential role-players for the persecuted. They need to discern what the church could specifically contribute, and for which interventions others, such as politicians or the media, could be motivated.

### *Serving the Persecuted*

#### MIGRATION AND RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

When working among migrants, churches should pay special attention to those who have fled religious persecution or have been expelled from their home countries for religious reasons.<sup>16</sup>

Special attention needs to be paid to special needs resulting from this. These needs go far beyond what well-established local Christians expect of their churches, and involve especially the replacement of family and extended family as well as the building of economically secure livelihoods. In some cases, especially conversions, these migrants are not safe from harassment or persecution at the hands of their relatives, adherents of other worldviews which may have oppressed them, or the secret services of their

<sup>13</sup> Cf C.L. Tieszen, *Re-examining religious persecution* (Kempton Park, South Africa: AcadSA, 2008), 47; and R. Boyd-MacMillan, 'Why the UN can't help Lucy', in *Faith that endures*, 99.

<sup>14</sup> Cf C. Sauer, 'Between advocacy and readiness to suffer', in *IJRF* 2.1 (2009), 73-91.

<sup>15</sup> Cf Boyd-MacMillan, *Faith that endures*, Ch. 10: 'What works when? Seven tactics of intervention assessed', 254-83.

<sup>16</sup> On the relocation of the persecuted, cf J. Andrews, 'Relocation as a response to persecution', in *St Francis Magazine*, 7.2 (2011), 35-48.

native countries, especially if they were publicly engaged in Christian activities.

Churches engaged on behalf of asylum-seekers should remember persecuted Christians in particular. In asylum procedures, administrations usually require that credible evidence for a case of (religious) persecution be provided. In certain countries, public involvement of the church regarding the persecution of Christians contributes to an adequate understanding of the circumstances, next to the efforts of research institutions and human rights organisations.

Conversion to the Christian faith as a cause of persecution needs to be taken very seriously. The phenomenon of numerous conversions, e.g. of former Muslims – especially from Iran, for example – must not be ignored.<sup>17</sup> In view of the great variety of motives for conversion, local churches should allow these converts to prove their faith, and also, in due course, to overcome inappropriate motives. This puts the churches in a good position to reject, with authority, possible demands by asylum authorities for exorbitant measures of proof of the genuineness of such conversions.<sup>18</sup> In addition, churches rightly insist that religious freedom must be protected and free from persecution, not only in the *forum internum* but also in the *forum externum* – i.e. the practice of religion in community and in public.

#### DISASTER RELIEF ABROAD

In Christian-motivated disaster relief in contexts with religious tensions, the dynamics of existing or possible oppression and persecution need to be taken into consideration. Special attention needs to be paid to Christians in these circumstances. One also has to expect that Christians who were already marginalised or oppressed before a disaster will also be discriminated against, systematically or individually, when aid is administered by indigenous institutions. It is therefore necessary and perfectly legitimate to specifically grant aid to Christians and those who are otherwise overlooked.

In summary, public theology and the praxis of the church, in response to discrimination and persecution of Christians, should reflect standards of best practice and good relations among the role-players engaged in advocacy. Human rights-based advocacy for religious freedom for all should be integrated with a spiritually motivated response to the persecution of Christians, which is focused on advancing the Kingdom of

---

<sup>17</sup> Cf D. Greenlee, *From the straight path to the narrow way: Journeys of faith* (Waynesboro, GA, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Even a conversion after fleeing for other reasons (e.g. ethnic or political) must not be considered illegitimate. It is also protected by religious freedom.

God. Special attention needs to be given to issues of migration and disaster relief.

After having explored theological foundations and practical challenges, it remains to survey structural expressions of Christian solidarity in the face of persecution.

### **The Role of Global Christian Structures**

While local solidarity and national and regional structures are of importance, this survey is limited to global structural expressions of Christian solidarity in the face of discrimination and persecution. Such structures and networks are of particular importance in view of transnational aspects, such as migration, the export or emulation of policies restricting religious freedom, or the differing roles and advocacy potential of particular nations within global power dynamics. The roles of the Vatican, the World Evangelical Alliance, the World Council of Churches, the Orthodox and Oriental churches, and the Global Christian Forum will be briefly reviewed.

Within the Roman Catholic Church, solidarity with the persecuted is mainly expressed through existing hierarchical structures, signifying at the top level the bishops' conferences of the world regions and the Vatican, with the Pope also playing the role of figurehead and major spokesperson of global Christianity in public opinion. Pope John Paul II was a trailblazer for the commemoration of the Catholic martyrs of the past. His initiative had a ripple effect into other denominations. An agency with a papal commission for the persecuted is Aid for the Church in Need, with branches in several countries. However, there is, so far, no specific institutional entity within the Vatican that is dedicated specifically to the topics of religious freedom for all and of the persecution of Christians. This is different for issues such as Christian unity or inter-religious dialogue for which Pontifical Councils have mandates, personnel, expertise and funding.

On the Protestant evangelical side, religious freedom solidarity across denominational boundaries and advocacy for persecuted Christians is part of the DNA and history of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) and its predecessor organisations since 1846.<sup>19</sup> Its Religious Liberty Commission engages with this topic and has, for example, established the annual Global Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church which is widely observed. The International Institute for Religious Freedom, as a scholarly research entity and network, has chosen to establish itself under the auspices of the WEA in 2005, while serving a wider constituency and promoting religious freedom research in academia globally. The Religious Liberty Partnership – taking its initial impulse from the issue group 'The persecuted church' of a

---

<sup>19</sup> Cf T. Schirrmacher, 'The early history of the Evangelical Alliance and of its advocacy for religious freedom', in *IJRF* 5.1 (2012).

consultation by the Lausanne Movement for World Evangelization in 2004 – has functioned since 2007 as a network of human rights organisations and missionary societies (currently of mainly evangelical persuasion) who are engaged in advocacy for persecuted Christians.<sup>20</sup>

The World Council of Churches incorporates the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), which covers matters of religious freedom among its concerns.<sup>21</sup> In its early years, this commission and the nascent WCC played a vital role in the formulation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Under the current secretary general of the WCC, the topic of religious freedom and the persecution of Christians has regained an increasing role on the agenda of WCC and CCIA.

Concerning the Orthodox and Oriental churches, a good number of which are members of the WCC, a joint voice in matters of freedom of belief could be improved by an intended pan-Orthodox council.

The Global Christian Forum, which started as a trust-building initiative between leaders of all streams of world Christianity – Catholic, Evangelical, Independent, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Protestant/Anglican – is now also venturing into topical challenges facing the global church. Its representatives have observed that there are gaps and definite potential for improvement in global Christian solidarity when it comes to the persecution of Christians. A global inter-church consultation proposed for late 2015 on ‘Discrimination, Persecution and Martyrdom: Following Christ Together’ pursues a fourfold goal: ‘(1) To better listen to, learn from, and accompany churches in situations of discrimination, persecution and martyrdom; (2) To inform one another of our activities in support of churches in situations of conflict, discrimination, persecution or martyrdom; (3) To seek a common understanding of the facts of the situations, as well as a more common framework and language for the development of appropriate Christian responses to them; (4) To encourage Global Christian Forum participant churches and organisations to speak and work together in response to these situations.’ Three prior and simultaneous processes were planned to lead to this consultation: (1) Reflections on language used to describe situations of discrimination, persecution and martyrdom; (2) Visits of small inter-church teams to countries where churches face discrimination, persecution and/or martyrdom; (3) Collation and summary of existing data on, and voices from, churches in situations of discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom.

---

<sup>20</sup> [www.rlpартnership.org](http://www.rlpартnership.org)

<sup>21</sup> Cf ‘Study Consultation on Freedom of Religion and Rights of Religious Minorities of the WCC’, in *Commission of the Churches on International Affairs* 2011’, *IJRF* 5.2 (2011), 133-36.



## **Conclusion**

Christian solidarity in the face of persecution has been examined from a theological, a practical and a structural perspective. Theologically speaking, Christian unity in the face of affliction is a witness to the world. Consequently, Christian disunity in the face of persecution weakens Christian witness to the world and should therefore be avoided. Expressions of solidarity strengthen the witness of the church in the face of persecution and are therefore a goal to be pursued.

Regarding the response of the church to persecution, it is essential that this response is shaped by a genuinely Christian profile. Essential elements are found in liturgical practice, among which are special days of prayer for persecuted Christians, sermons, and liturgical intercession.

Public theology and the praxis of the church in response to discrimination and persecution of Christians should reflect standards of best practice and good relations among role-players engaged in advocacy. Human rights-based advocacy for religious freedom for all should be integrated with a spiritually motivated response to the persecution of Christians, focused on advancing the Kingdom of God. Special attention needs to be given to issues of migration and disaster relief.

Global structural expressions of Christian solidarity play a particular role in the face of discrimination and persecution.

## SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abbink, Jon, 'An historical-anthropological approach to Islam in Ethiopia: Issues of identity and politics', in *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 11.2 (1998): 109-24.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 'Rethinking Resistance in African History: An Introduction' in Jon Abbink, Mirjam De Bruijn and Klass Van Walraven (eds), *Rethinking resistance: revolt and violence in African history*. Leiden: Brill, 2003.
- Akçam, Taner, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility*. New York: Henry Holt, 2006.
- Allen, Charles, *Ashoka: The Search for India's Lost Emperor*. New York: The Overlook Press, 2012.
- ANAJURE – National Association of Evangelical Jurists in Brazil, *The right to religious freedom in Brazil and in the world*. São Paulo: ANAJURE Publicações, 2014.
- Andersen, Walter K. and Shridhar D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism*. New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 1987.
- Arles, Siga, 'Mission and Conversion in the Changing Context of India with the Growth of Hindutva Movement – the Christian Response', in *Journal for Christian Scholarship*. Bloemfontein, South Africa: University of the Free State, Special Edition (2009): 29-45.
- Armstrong, Karen, *Holy War. The Crusades and their Impact on Today's World*. New York: Doubleday/Anchor Books, 1992.
- Arnold-Foster, Frances E., *Heralds of the cross: or, The fulfilling of the command: Chapters on missionary work*. London: Hatchards, 1882.
- Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma), *Burma. A Land where Buddhist Monks are Disrobed and Detained in Dungeons*. Unpublished report, 2004: [www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/Detained\\_monks.pdf](http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/Detained_monks.pdf) [accessed 21st April 2015].
- Barrett, David B. and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Trends AD 30-AD 2200*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2001.
- Barrett, David B., George T. Kurian and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia, Second Edition, Volume 2*. Oxford: OUP, 2001.
- Basu, Tapan, et al, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993.
- Bauckham, Richard J., *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*. Cambridge: CUP, 1993.
- Bauman, Chad M., *Pentecostals, Proselytization, and Anti-Christian Violence in Contemporary India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Baumann, Andreas, *Der Orient für Christus*. Johannes Lepsius – Biographie und Missiologie. Giessen: Brunnen Verlag, 2007.
- Baxi, Upendra and Bhikhu Parekh (eds), *Crisis and Change in Contemporary India*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995.
- Bayram. M., 'UZBEKISTAN: Raids, religious literature seizures, passport confiscations and expulsions'. *Forum 18 News Service*, 1st September 2014: [www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1991](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1991) [accessed November 2014].
- Beitz, Charles, *The Idea of Human Rights*. Oxford: OUP, 2009.

- Belke, Thomas J. Juche., *A Christian Study of North Korea's State Religion*. Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice, 1999.
- Ben-Sasson, H.H., *History of the Jews*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985.
- Beschastna, Tatyana, 'Freedom of expression in Russia as it Relates to Criticism of the Government', in *Emory International Law Review* Vol. 27 (2014). 1105-44.
- Beyerhaus, Peter, 'Martyrdom – gate to the kingdom of heaven', in *God's kingdom and the utopian error: Discerning the biblical kingdom of God from its political counterfeits*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway (1992), 163-79.
- Bielefeldt, Heiner, *Freedom of Religion and Belief*, in Religious Freedom Series 3. Bonn: VKW, 2014.
- Birri, Debela, 'Rev Gudina Tumsa and the Ecumenical Movement of the 1970s', in *The Life and Ministry of Rev. Gudina Tumsa*. Addis Ababa: The Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2001.
- Blitt, Robert C., 'Whither Secular Bear? The Russian Orthodox Church's Strengthening Influence on Russia's Domestic and Foreign Policy', in *Fides et Libertas: The Journal of the International Religious Liberty Association*. (2011): 89-125.
- Bob Fu, 'Persecution and Christian Apologetics: The Dynamic Growth of the Chinese Church', in *Colaw Lecture series at OKWU* (19th March 2003).
- Bogdanova, O., *Pravoslavnye v Uzbekistane: Zhizn vopreki*. Translated: Orthodoxy in Uzbekistan: Life Notwithstanding: [www.taday.ru/text/1017850.html](http://www.taday.ru/text/1017850.html) [accessed November 2014].
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *The Cost of Discipleship*. New York: Macmillan, 1963.
- Bourdieu, Pierre and Jean-Claude Passeron, *La reproduction: Éléments d'une théorie du système d'enseignement*. Paris, 1970.
- Bosch, David J., *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Witness to the World*. London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1980.
- Boyd-MacMillan, Ronald, *Faith that Endures: The Essential Guide to the Persecuted Church*. Lancaster, UK: Sovereign World, 2006.
- Brauch, Manfred T., 'How Long, O Lord? A Theological Perspective on Suffering', in *The Brandywine Review of Faith and International Affairs*. 2:3 (Winter 2004-2005): 11-17.
- Brett, M., 'The Arab Conquest and the Rise of Islam in North Africa'. Clark, C.D., J.D. Fage and Roland Oliver (eds), *The Cambridge History of Africa*. Vols. 1-8, Cambridge: CUP, 1975-1986.
- Brunner, Emil, *Dogmatics III: The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith and the Consummation*. Cambridge: James Clarke & Co [1962]. Reprint edition, 2002.
- Buchanan, Alan, *The Heart of Human Rights*. Oxford: OUP, 2009.
- Budde, Michael L. and Karen Scott (eds), *Witness to the Body: The Past, Present and Future of Christian Martyrdom*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011.
- Cao, Nanlai, *Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011.
- Carvalho, Felipe Augusto Lopes, *Fundamentos da Proteção Jurídica À Liberdade de Organização Religiosa No Brasil*. Campina Grande, 2002.
- Catholic Bishops of Eritrea, 'Where is your brother?' Pastoral Letter of 25th May 2014. Tigrinya version: <http://asmarino.com/alewuna/2093-the-most-daring-message-to-come-out-of-eritrea-> [accessed 7th June 2014]. English translation:

- <http://awate.com/pastoral-letter-a-complete-and-literal-translation> – translation by Semere T. Habtemariam [accessed 19th June 2014].
- Chan, Kim-kwong and Eric R. Carlson, *Religious Freedom in China: Policy, Administration, and Regulation – A Research Handbook*. Santa Barbara, CA: Institute for the Study of American Religion, 2005.
- Cherian, Mathew Thomas, *Hindutva Agenda & Minority Rights: A Christian Response*. Bangalore, India: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2007.
- Chin Human Rights Organization, *Threats to our existence*. Unpublished report, September 2012.
- Christian Solidarity Worldwide, *Carrying the cross*. Unpublished report, 2007: <http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=report&id=36> [accessed 21st April 2015].
- Christian Solidarity Worldwide, *Impact Report 2014: Upholding Religious Freedom for All*. UK, 2014.
- Clauss, Manfred, 'Konstantin', in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart (RGG)*, 4th edition, Vol. 4. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck (2008): cols. 1618-19.
- Collins, Robert, *Marked for Life: Songbun, North Korea's Social Classification System*. Washington, DC: The Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2012.
- Corley F., 'TURKMENISTAN: Singing about God here is banned', in *Forum 18 News Service*, 20th December 2013: [www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1911](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1911) [accessed November 2014].
- Costea, Peter, 'Church and State Relations in the Marxist-Leninist Regimes of the Third World', in *Journal of Church and State*, 32: 2 (1990).
- Courbage, Youssef and Philippe Fargues, *Christians and Jews under Islam*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998.
- Dahle, Lars, 'Mission in 3D: A key Lausanne III theme', in Dahle, M.S., L. Dahle and K. Jørgensen (eds), *The Lausanne Movement: A Range of Perspectives*. Oxford: Regnum (2014): 265-79.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 'Truth, Christian Mission and Apologetics: A Response and A Proposal', in *The Norwegian Journal of Missiology*, 67:1 (2013): 21-38.
- Davies, J.G., *The Early Christian Church: A History of the Its First Five Centuries*. Reprint edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980.
- Davis, Raymond, *Fire on the Mountain*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1966.
- Davis, Stephen J., *The Early Coptic Papacy: The Egyptian Church and Its Leadership in Late Antiquity*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2004.
- Dirar, Uoldelul Chelati, 'Church-state relations in colonial Eritrea: Missionaries and the development of colonial strategies (1869-1911)', in *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 8.3 (2003): 391-410.
- Eby, O., *Fifty Years, Fifty Stories: The Mennonite Mission in Somalia, 1953-2003*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2003.
- Effimov, Andrei B., *Ocherki po istorii missionerstva Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi*. Moskva: Izdatelstvo Pravoslavnogo sviato-Tikhonovskogo universiteta, 2007. Translated: *Essays on history of mission of the Russian Orthodox Church*. Moscow: Orthodox University of St Tikhon's Publishing, 2007.
- Eide, Ø.M., *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia: the Growth and Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church, 1974-86*. Oxford: James Currey, 2000.
- Elliott, Mark and Anita Deyneka, 'Protestant Missionaries in the Former Soviet Union', in Witte, John Jr. and Michael Bourdeaux (eds), *Proselytism and*

- Orthodoxy in Russia: The New War for Souls*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books (1999): 197-225.
- EriWongel.com, 'The story of Wedi Asmara in his own words', 2007: [www.eriwongel.com/content/view/90/107/lang,en](http://www.eriwongel.com/content/view/90/107/lang,en) [accessed 22nd October 2007].
- Evangelisches Missionswerk in Deutschland (eds), *Menschenrechte*, Jahrbuch Mission 2005. Hamburg: Verlag Evangelische Mission, 2005.
- Evans, Malcolm, *Religious Liberty and International Law in Europe*. Cambridge: CUP, 1997.
- Fagan Geraldine, *Believing in Russia – Religious Policy after Communism*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2013.
- Farris, Michael, *From Tyndale to Madison*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2007.
- Fautré, Willy, Jan Nils Schubert and Alfiaz Vaiya (eds), *Freedom of Religion or Belief*. World Report 2012. Brussels: Human Rights Without Frontiers Int., 2013.
- Fernando, A., *The call to joy and pain: embracing suffering in your ministry*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007.
- FIAJC – Federación Interamericana de Juristas Cristianos, 'Letter to the President of Colombia', 2015: [www.anajure.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Carta-al-Presidente-Santos-COLOMBIA-Feb.-28-2015.pdf](http://www.anajure.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Carta-al-Presidente-Santos-COLOMBIA-Feb.-28-2015.pdf) [accessed 23rd April 2015].
- Finney, John, 'Leadership in Mission: The Stripping of the Church', in *Theologische Beiträge* 45 (2014), 267-83.
- Finucane, Juliana and R. Michael Feener (eds), *Proselytizing and the Limits of Religious Pluralism in Contemporary Asia*. Singapore: Springer, 2014.
- Fite, Daniel, 'The Challenge of Denominational Conflict in the Context of the Ethiopian Evangelical Churches'. Senior essay. Addis Ababa: Mekane Yesus Seminary, 2001.
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office of UK Government, *Human Rights and Democracy Report 2013*, 2014: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2013/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2013> [accessed 23rd April 2015].
- Frend, W.H.C., *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus*. Reprint edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Donatist Church*. Oxford: OUP, 1952.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 'Donatismus', in *Reallexikon f. Antike u. Christentum* 25 vols. Vol. 4. Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1959.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Rise of Christianity*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984.
- Ghiletschi, Valeriu, *Document 13660: Report to The Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination. Tackling intolerance and discrimination in Europe with a special focus on Christians*. Strasbourg: Parliamentary Assembly – Council of Europe, 7th January 2015.
- Gillman, I. and H.J. Klimkeit (eds), *Christians in Asia before 1500*. East Lansing, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999.
- Goddard, Hugh, *Muslim Perceptions of Christianity*. London: Grey Seal Books, 1996.

- Goossaert, Vincent and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- Green, Michael, *Evangelism in the Early Church*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970.
- Grim, Brian J. and Roger Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Conflict and Persecution in the 21st Century*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Grim, Brian J., Greg Clark and Robert Snyder, 'Is Religious Freedom Good for Business? A Conceptual and Empirical Analysis', in *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*. Volume 10: Article 4 (2014).
- Grim, Brian J., Todd M. Johnson, Gina Bellofatto and Vegard Skirbekk, *Yearbook of International Religious Demography 2014*. Leiden: Brill, 2014.
- Griswold, E., *The Tenth Parallel: Dispatches from the Fault Line between Christianity and Islam*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010.
- Guinness, Os, *Renaissance. The Power of the Gospel However Dark the Times*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Global Public Square. Religious Freedom and the Making of a World Safe for Diversity*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013.
- Haede, Wolfgang, 'Perceptions of Christians in Turkey? – A study of the climate of accusations against Christians in Turkish newspapers', in *International Journal for Religious Freedom*, Vol 6, 1-2/2013 (2013): 65-84.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 'The historical background of the highly critical perception of Christians by the Turkish society', in *Mission Studies* 31 (2014): 191-205.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Necati Aydın, a Turkish Martyr for Christ*. Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice, 2012.
- Haile, A.A. and David W. Shenk, *Teatime in Mogadishu. My Journey as a Peace Ambassador in the World of Islam*. Harrisonburg, VA: Herald, 2011.
- Haqqani, Hussain, *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005.
- Harnack, Adolf von, *Die Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*. Vols. 1-2. Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1924.
- Harper, M., *Getting Somalia Wrong? Faith, War and Hope in a Shattered State*. New York: Zed, 2012.
- Haryadi, Mathias, 'Central Sulawesi, New wave of Islamist violence: Murders, kidnappings, mutilations', in *Asia News*, 2015: [www.asianews.it/index.php?art=33245&l=en](http://www.asianews.it/index.php?art=33245&l=en) [accessed 23rd April 2015].
- Haustein, Jörg, *Writing Religious History: The Historiography of Ethiopian Pentecostalism*. Studies in the History of Christianity in the Non-Western World. Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 2011.
- Hayee, Bilal, 'Blasphemy Laws and Pakistan's Human Rights Obligations', 2012: [www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/UNDAULawRw/2012/3.pdf](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/UNDAULawRw/2012/3.pdf) [accessed 21st April 2015].
- Hege, Nathan, *Beyond our Prayers*. Scottsdale, AZ: Herald Press, 1998.
- Heryawan, Ahmad, 'Press Release: Larangan Kegiatan Jemaat Ahmadiyah di Jawa Barat', Governor of West Java, 2011: [www.ahmadheryawan.com/home/di-media-2/396-press-release-larangan-kegiatan-jemaat-ahmadiyah-di-jawa-barat](http://www.ahmadheryawan.com/home/di-media-2/396-press-release-larangan-kegiatan-jemaat-ahmadiyah-di-jawa-barat) [accessed 23rd April 2015].
- Herzog, Christof, 'Small and Large Scale Conspiracy Theories and Their Problems: An Example from Turkey', in Reinkowski, Maurus & Michael Butter, (eds),

- Conspiracy Theories in the United States and the Middle East. A Comparative Approach.* Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014: 194-211.
- Hulsman, Cornelis, 'Christen in Ägypten: Die wachsende Kluft zwischen Islamisten und Nicht-Islamisten', in *Missio* 54, September 2011: [www.missio-hilft.de/media/thema/menschenrechte/studie/54-aegypten.pdf](http://www.missio-hilft.de/media/thema/menschenrechte/studie/54-aegypten.pdf) [accessed 21st April 2015].
- \_\_\_\_\_, 'Discrepancies Between Coptic Statistics in the Egyptian Census and Estimates Provided by the Coptic Orthodox Church', in *MIDEO* 29 (2012): 419-482.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 'Does the Shari'a prohibit building churches?' in *Arab-West Report*. Week 44, Art. 39, 4th November 2011: [www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-44/39-does-sharia-prohibit-building-churches](http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2011/week-44/39-does-sharia-prohibit-building-churches) [accessed 21st April 2015].
- \_\_\_\_\_, 'Seventh century documents about the arrival of Islam in Egypt', in *Arab-West Report*. Week 8, Art. 2, 19th March 2009: [www.arabwestreport.info/year-2009/week-8/2-seventh-century-documents-about-arrival-islam-egypt](http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2009/week-8/2-seventh-century-documents-about-arrival-islam-egypt) [accessed 21st April 2015].
- Human Rights Resource Centre, *Keeping the Faith: A Study of Freedom of Thought, Conscience, and Religion in ASEAN*. Jakarta: January 2015.
- Human Rights Watch, *World Report: Burma*. Unpublished report 2014: [www.hrw.org/world-report-%5Bscheduler-publish-yyyy%5D/world-report-2014-burma](http://www.hrw.org/world-report-%5Bscheduler-publish-yyyy%5D/world-report-2014-burma) [accessed 21st April 2015].
- \_\_\_\_\_, *All you can do is pray*. Unpublished report, 2013: [www.hrw.org/reports/2013/04/22/all-you-can-do-pray-0](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2013/04/22/all-you-can-do-pray-0) [accessed 21st April 2015].
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Indonesia*, Vol. 14, No. 9, 2002: [www.hrw.org/reports/2002/indonesia/indonesia1102-03.htm](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/indonesia/indonesia1102-03.htm) [accessed 23rd April 2015].
- Hunter, Alan and Chan, Kim-kwong, *Protestantism in Contemporary China*. Cambridge: CUP, 1993.
- Huntington, Samuel P., *The Third Wave*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993.
- ICN, *Readiness to Suffer for Christ, A Pastoral Directive from the Second Ecumenical Congress of the International Christian Network in Bad Blankenburg, Germany, 15th-18th October 2006*: [www.institut-diakrisis.de/PDEnglishVersion.pdf](http://www.institut-diakrisis.de/PDEnglishVersion.pdf)
- Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, '1999-2000 Report: Treatment of ethnic Indonesians who have converted to Christianity; the number of ethnic Indonesian Christians [IDN33997.E]', 22nd March 2000: [www.ecoi.net/local\\_link/179828/282302\\_en.html](http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/179828/282302_en.html) [accessed 23rd April 2015].
- Index Mundi, 'Pakistan Demographics Profile 2014'. Index Mundi, 2014: [www.indexmundi.com/pakistan/demographics\\_profile.html](http://www.indexmundi.com/pakistan/demographics_profile.html) [accessed 23rd April 2015].
- International Institute for Religious Freedom, 'Resolution on Religious Freedom and Solidarity with the Persecuted Church of the World Evangelical Alliance' (30th October 2008): [www.iirf.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/PDFs/WEA\\_Res\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.iirf.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/PDFs/WEA_Res_ENG.pdf) [accessed 23rd April 2015].
- Irwin, Dale T. and Scott W. Sunquist, *Volume I. Earliest Christianity to 1453. History of the World Christian Movement*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007.



- \_\_\_\_\_, *Volume II: Modern Christianity from 1454-1800. History of the World Christian Movement*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012.
- Isichei, Elizabeth, *A History of Christianity in Africa from antiquity to the present*. London: SPCK, 1995.
- Jansen, Hans and Brian Doyle, *Muhammad: The Mecca and Medina Stories*. New York: Prometheus Books, 2012.
- Jehovah's Witnesses, 'Imprisoned for their faith', 2014:  
[www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/eritrea/jehovahs-witnesses-in-prison](http://www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/eritrea/jehovahs-witnesses-in-prison)  
 [accessed 17th October 2014].
- Jenkins, Philip, *The Lost History of Christianity*. Oxford: Lion, 2008.
- Jeyaraj, Dasan, *Followers of Christ outside the church in Chennai, India: A socio-historical study of a non-church movement*. Zoetermeer, Netherlands: Boekencentrum, 2010.
- Johnson, P. *History of the Jews*. USA: Harper Perennial, 1988.
- Johnson, Todd M. and Peter Crossing, 'Christianity 2014: Independent Christianity and Slumdweller' in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (1.38, No 1, January 2014).
- Jongeneel, Jan A.B., 'Apostasy', in Daneel, Inus, Charles van Engen and Hendrik Vroom (eds), *Fullness of life for all: Challenges for mission in early 21st century*. Amsterdam: Rodopi (2003): 181-87.
- Joshua, Fazl-ud-din, *The Future of Christians in Pakistan*. Lahore: Punjabi Darbar Publishing House, 1949.
- Julien, Ch.-A., *Etudes maghrebines*. Paris: Payot, 1968.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Histoire de l'Afrique du Nord. Tunisie-Algerie-Maroc*. Paris: Payot, 1952.
- Kalman, Matthew, *Jesus wept. The fate of the Christians in the Middle East*. 2014.
- Kang, Chol-Hwan and Pierre Rigoulot, *The Aquariums of Pyongyang*. New York: Basic Books, 2005.
- Karnavian, M. Tito, 'Indonesian Top Secret: Membongkar Konflik Poso', in *Gramedia Publications* (2008): 139-41.
- Kifleyesus, Abebe, 'Cosmologies in collision: Pentecostal conversion and Christian cults in Asmara', in *African Studies Review* 49.1 (2006): 79-84.
- Kim, Sang Hun, *Eyewitness: A Litany of North Korean Crimes against Humanity, Prima Facie Evidence, Chonko-ni Prison*. Seoul, Korea: North Korean Human Rights: The 3rd Way, 2012.
- Kirkpatrick, Melanie, *Escape from North Korea: The Untold Story of Asia's Underground Railroad*. New York: Encounter Books, 2012.
- Knox, Zoë, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church: Religion in Russia after Communism*. Abingdon, UK: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005.
- Koyama, Kosuke, 'What makes a missionary? Toward crucified mind, not crusading mind', in Anderson, Gerald H. and Thomas F. Stransky (eds), *Crucial issues in mission today*. New York: Paulist Press (1974): 117-32.
- Kozuharov Valentin, 'Mission in an Orthodox Christian Context: Witnessing to Christ as Pastoral Responsibility', in Ma, Wonsuk and Kenneth Ross (eds.), *Mission Spirituality and Authentic Discipleship*. Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, Volume 14. Oxford, Regnum Books International (2013): 110-26.
- Krabill, J.R., David W. Shenk and L. Stutzman, *Anabaptists Meeting Muslims: A Calling for Presence in the Way of Christ*. Scottdale, PA: Herald, 2005.
- Kretzmer, David and Eckart Klein (eds), *The Concept of Human Dignity in Human Rights Discourse*. The Hague/London/New York: Kluwer Law International, 2002.



- Kriegbaum, Bernhard, 'Donatismus', in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 5 vols. Vol. 2. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr, 1999.
- Lang, Graeme, 'Religions and regimes in China', in Madeleine Cousineau (ed), *Religion in a Changing World*. Westport, CT: Praeger (1998): 153-61.
- Latourette, Kenneth Scott, *The first five Centuries. A History of the Expansion of Christianity. Vol. 1*. New York: Harper, 1973.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Thousand Years of Uncertainty. A History of the Expansion of Christianity. Vol. 2*. New York: Zondervan, 1973.
- Lee, Y.K., *God's mission in suffering and martyrdom*. PhD Dissertation, Pasadena, CA.: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1999.
- Lindemann, Gerhard, *Die Geschichte der Evangelischen Allianz im Zeitalter des Liberalismus (1846-1879)*. Theologie: Forschung und Wissenschaft Bd. 24. Translated: *The History of the Evangelical Alliance in the Age of Liberalism (1846-1879)*. Theology – Research and Scholarship, Vol. 24. Münster: LIT, 2011.
- Lindholm, Tore, Cole Durham Jr. and Bahja Tahzib-Lie (eds), *Facilitating Freedom of Religion or Belief: A Deskbook*. Leiden, Netherlands: Marinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2004.
- Lunkin Roman, 'Rossiiskii Protestantism: evangelskie khristiane kak novyi sotsialnyi fenomen', v *Sovremennaya Evropa: Institute Evropy Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk*, No 3 (59), 2014: 133-43. Translated: Roman Lunkin, 'Russian Protestantism: Evangelical Christians as a New Social Phenomenon', in *Contemporary Europe: Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences*, No 3 (59), 2014: 133-43.
- Magnet, Joseph E. and Tolga Yalkin, 'Governance and its future in Eritrea', Concept Note of one-day colloquium on Eritrea, held on 1st October 2014, Ottawa, Canada (on file with authors).
- Maier, Paul L., *Eusebius: The Church History: A New Translation with Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1999.
- Malik, Yogendra K. and V.B. Singh, *Hindu Nationalists in India: The Rise of Bharatiya Janata Party*. New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 1994.
- Marlin, George J., *Christian persecutions in the Middle East, a 21st century tragedy*. South Bend, IN: St Augustine's Press, 2015.
- Marshall, Paul (ed), *Religious freedom in the world: A global report on freedom and persecution*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000.
- Marshall, Paul and Nina Shea, *Silenced. How Apostasy & Blasphemy Codes are Choking Freedom Worldwide*. Oxford: OUP, 2011.
- Marshall, Paul, *Their blood cries out: The worldwide tragedy of modern Christians who are dying for their faith*. Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1997.
- McCrae, David, *A Few Poorly Organized Men: Interreligious Violence in Poso, Indonesia*. Canberra: Australian National University, 2013.
- McKechnie, Paul, *The First Christian Centuries: Perspectives on the Early Church*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001.
- MECC, *Christianity. A history of the Middle East*. Beirut, 2005.
- Ministry of Religion, 'Artikel – Membincang SKB 2 Menteri', 2015: <http://pendis.kemenag.go.id/index.php?a=artikel&id2=imam001#.VMpc8MZj3X8> [accessed 23rd April 2015].
- Mitchel, Chris, Mel Cohen and Anne Severance (eds), *Destination Jerusalem. ISIS, Convert or Die, Christian persecution and preparing for the days ahead*. US: C & L Publishing LLC, 2015.

- Moffett, Samuel Hugh, *A History of Christianity in Asia. Volume I: Beginnings to 1500*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998.
- Molnar, Amadeo, *Die Waldenser: Geschichte und europäisches Ausmaß einer Ketzerbewegung*. Berlin: Union, 1973.
- Moore, G.F., *Judaism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966.
- Munayer, Salim J. and Lisa Loden, *Through my enemies' eyes*. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2014.
- Munir-ul-Anjum, 'The Role of Christians in the Freedom Movement of Pakistan: An Appraisal', in *Pakistan Journal of Social Studies (PJSS)*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2012.
- Murphy, Dan, 'Al Qaeda's new frontier: Indonesia', in *Christian Science Monitor*, 1st May 2002.
- Murray, Stuart, *Post-Christendom*. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2004.
- Muttaqien, Andi, 'Kekerasan Atas Nama Agama, Tindakan Fatal Vonis Minimal', in *Legal Advocate ELSAM*, 2012: <http://docs.google.com/document/d/14ZG0RJzffB3y-6yVTreSCOGx0XOY03UHotsNImOlepo/edit> [accessed 23rd April 2015].
- Nefes, Turkey Salim, 'Political Parties' Perceptions and Uses of Anti-Semitic Conspiracy Theories in Turkey', in *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 61/2 (2013): 247-64.
- Negash, Ghirmai, 'The priests have spoken: Beginnings of liberation theology in Eritrea' [original text in Tigrinya], 2014: <http://goo.gl/UyeCds> [accessed 23rd August 2014].
- Neill, Stephen, *A History of Christian Missions*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1966.
- Nickel, James W., *Making Sense of Human Rights*. Second Edition. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
- Obsfgi, Teka, *The Charismatic Movement in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus*. MA Thesis. Addis Ababa: Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology, 2000.
- Open Doors, *World Watch List 2014*: <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/downloads/pdf-downloads/2014-wwl-top-3.pdf> [accessed November 2014].
- Patung, 'Rebekka Zakaria, Eti Pangesti and Ratna Bangun' in *Indonesia Matters*, 2006: [www.indonesiamatters.com/691/rebekka-zakaria-eti-pangesti-ratna-bangun](http://www.indonesiamatters.com/691/rebekka-zakaria-eti-pangesti-ratna-bangun) [accessed 23rd April 2015].
- Pelikan, Jaroslav, *The Excellent Empire: The Fall of Rome and the Triumph of the Church*. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1987.
- Penner, G., *In the shadow of the cross: A biblical theology of persecution and discipleship*. Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice, 2004.
- Peters, Tim A., 'Dark Night of the Soul: The Price of Exercising Religious Belief in North Korea', in *Testimony presented to a hearing of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on International Freedom of Religion or Belief*. London: UK Parliament, 2014.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 'Refugees' (Chapter 6), in Kotch, John and Frank-Jurgen Richter (eds), *Korea Confronts the Future*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2005.
- Pew Research Center, 'Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High', 2014: [www.pewforum.org/2014/01/14/religious-hostilities-reach-six-year-high](http://www.pewforum.org/2014/01/14/religious-hostilities-reach-six-year-high) [accessed 21st April 2015].

- Peyrouse, S., 'Christian minorities on the Central Asian Silk Roads', in Wilfred, Felix (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Pieris, John, 'Tragedi Maluku: sebuah krisis peradaban: analisis kritis aspek politik', in *Yayasan Obor Indonesia* (2004): 261.
- Pitirimov, D., *Istoriya Khristianstva v Tsentralnoy Azii*. Translated: History of Christianity in Central Asia: [www.touruz.narod.ru/articles/articles\\_1.htm#06](http://www.touruz.narod.ru/articles/articles_1.htm#06) [accessed November 2014].
- Plath, G., 'Aus der Erfahrung der Missionsarbeit geschöpfte Wünsche und Ratschläge, wie die deutschen Kolonialverwaltungen die Eingeborenen zu behandeln haben', in *Allgemeine Missionszeitschrift AMZ* 13 (1886): 62-72.
- Poe, Harry Lee, *Christian Witness in a Postmodern World*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001.
- Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2014:  
[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html) [accessed 23rd April 2015].
- Powell, Bill, 'Long Walk to Freedom', in *TIME magazine*:  
<http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2056132,00.html> [accessed 1st May 2006]
- Prabhakar, M.E., 'Saffronization of Education', in *Religion and Society*, 26:4 December 1999 and 47:1, March 2000.
- Radio Erena, 'Eritrean monasteries denounce government interference in church affairs' [original news item in Tigrinya], 2014: <http://goo.gl/r5PnrV> [accessed 15th October 2014].
- Raheb, Mitri, *Sailing through troubled waters. Christianity in the Middle East*. Seattle, WA: Createspace, 2013.
- Raj, Ebe Sunder et al, *Divide to Rule: Communal Attacks on Christians in India during 1997-2000: Full details, Reasons, Allegations and Answers*. Chennai: Bharat Jyoti, 2000.
- Rathgeber, Theodor, *Ökumenischer Bericht zur Religionsfreiheit Weltweit 2013. Das Recht auf Religions- und Weltanschauungsfreiheit weltweit. Bedrohungen – Einschränkungen – Verletzungen*, EKD 2013:  
[www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse\\_downloads/presse\\_2012/GT21\\_Oekum-Bericht\\_web.pdf](http://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/presse_2012/GT21_Oekum-Bericht_web.pdf) [accessed 21st April 2015]
- Reiss, Wolfram, *Erneuerung in der Koptisch-Orthodoxe Kirche. Die Geschichte der koptisch-orthodoxen Sonntagsschulbewegung und die Aufnahme ihrer Reformansätze in den Erneuerungsbewegungen der Koptisch-Orthodoxen Kirche der Gegenwart*, Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte 5. Hamburg: LIT Verlag, 1996.
- Reus-Smit, Christian, *Individual Rights and the Making of the International System*. Cambridge: CUP, 2013.
- Reynolds, N.B. and W.C. Durham Jr. (eds), *Religious Liberty in Western Thought*. Atlanta, GA: Scholar Press for Emory University, 1996.
- Ripken, Nik, *Servants in the Crucible: Findings from a Global Study on Persecution and the Implications for Sending Agencies and Sending Churches*, 2004: <http://nikriipken.com/wp-content/themes/nikriipken/downloads/Servants%20in%20the%20Crucible.pdf> [accessed 16th February 2015].

- Risse, Thomas, Stephen C. Ropp and Kathryn Sikkink (eds), *The Power of Human Rights*. Cambridge: CUP, 1999.
- Robertson, S., *Freedom of Religion. A Human Rights Issue*, Bangalore, 2007.
- Rogers, B., *A Land Without Evil*. Oxford: Monarch Books, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *A Nation at the Crossroads*. London: Ebury Publishing, 2012.
- Russell, Gerard, *Heirs to forgotten kingdoms. Journeys into the disappearing religions of the Middle East*. New York: Basic Books, 2013.
- Salisbury, Joyce E., *Perpetua's Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Sampson, C. and J.P. Lederach., *From the Ground Up: Mennonite Contributions to International Peacebuilding*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Sauer, Christof (ed), Bad Urach Statement: *Towards an Evangelical Theology of Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom*. Bonn: VKW, 2010.
- Sauer, Christof, *Martyrium und Mission*. Erlangen: Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene, 2015 (forthcoming).
- Savarkar, Vinayak Damodar, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* Pune: SP Gokhale, 1947.
- Scheel, Otto, 'Donatismus', in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart Vol. 1-5*. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr, 1910-1913.
- Scheuner, Ulrich, 'Die Menschenrechte in der ökumenischen Diskussion', in *ÖR* 24 (1975): 152-64.
- Schirmmacher, Christine, 'Es ist kein Zwang in der Religion' (Sure 2,256): *Der Abfall vom Islam im Urteil zeitgenössischer islamischer Theologen. Diskurse zu Apostasie, Religionsfreiheit und Menschenrechten*. Würzburg, Germany, 2015.
- Schirmmacher, Thomas, 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World – Three Years On', *Current Dialogue* 56 (2014): 67-79: [www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/current-dialogue-magazine/current-dialogue-56](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/current-dialogue-magazine/current-dialogue-56) [accessed 23rd April 2015].
- \_\_\_\_\_, 'Christianity and Democracy' in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 35 (2011): 51-60.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 'Democracy and Christian Ethics', in Burcea, Nelu and Thomas Schirmmacher (eds), *Journalul Libertății de Conștiință*. Bukarest: Editura Universitară (2013): 568-80.
- Schlink, Edmund, 'Christus – die Hoffnung für die Welt', in Foko Lüpsen (ed), *Evanston Dokumente: Berichte und Reden auf der Weltkirchenkonferenz in Evanston*. Witten, Germany: Luther Verlag (1954): 135-44.
- Schnabel, Eckhard J., *Early Christian Mission (Vol. 2): Paul and the Early Church*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP and Leicester, UK: Apollos, 2004.
- Schnittkind, Dana A. (pseudonym: Dana Lee Thomas), *Crusaders for God*. New York: A.A. Wyna, 1952.
- Seiple, Robert A., 'The Hidden Faces of Suffering', in *The Brandywine Review of Faith and International Affairs*. 2:3 (Winter 2004-2005): 1-10.
- Sensenig, P.M., *Peace Clan: Mennonite Theology and Practice of Peacemaking in Somalia, 1953-2013*. Unpublished dissertation. Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 2013.
- Shaw, Mark R., *The Kingdom of God in Africa. A short History of African Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996.
- Shenk, David W., *A Study of Mennonite Presence and Church Development in Somalia from 1950 through 1970*. Unpublished dissertation. New York: New York University, 1972.

- Skarsaune, O., *In the Shadow of the Temple*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008.
- Sookhdeo, Patrick, *A People Betrayed*. Fearn, UK: Christian Focus & Isaac, 2002.
- Spark, Joseph, *Isis: Killing Jesus in the Middle East*. Los Gatos, CA: Smashwords, 2014.
- Stackhouse, Max L., *Creeds, Society and Human Rights (Study in Three Cultures)*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Human Rights and the Global Mission of the Church*. Cambridge, MA: Boston Theological Institute, 1985.
- Stark, Rodney, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*. San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1997.
- Stone, Bryan, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007.
- Swanson, Mark N., *The Coptic Papacy in Islamic Egypt, 641-1517*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010.
- Taylor, Paul M., *Freedom of Religion, UN and European Human Rights and Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Taylor, William, Antonia van der Meer and Reg Reimer, *Sorrow & Blood. Christian Mission in Contexts of Suffering, Persecution, and Martyrdom*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2012.
- Theodore, Gabriel, *Christian Citizens of An Islamic State: The Pakistan Experience*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2007.
- Thiessen, Elmer, *The Ethics of Evangelism. A Philosophical Defence of Proselytizing and Persuasion*. Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 2011.
- Tieszen, Charles L., *Re-examining Religious Persecution*. Kempton Park, South Africa: AcadSA, 2008
- Tilahun, *Yemeseret Krestos Bete Krestyian Tarik*. Addis Ababa: Mega Publishers.
- Trigg, Roger, 'New Threats to Religious Freedom in Europe and their Implications', In *Lausanne Global Analysis*. 2:2 (March 2013).
- UN Commission of Inquiry on the DPRK, *Report of the detailed findings on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (A/HRC/25/CRP.1)*. Geneva: UN Human Rights Council, 2014.
- UNESCO (ed), *Human Rights, Comments and Interpretations*, UNESCO/PHS/3 (rev.). Paris, 25th July 1948.
- United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*: [www.un.org/en/documents/udhr](http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr) [accessed November 2014].
- US Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Annual report: Burma*. Unpublished report, 2014: [www.uscirf.gov/reports-briefs/annual-report/2014-annual-report](http://www.uscirf.gov/reports-briefs/annual-report/2014-annual-report) [accessed 21st April 2015].
- US Department of State – Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights & Labor International, *Religious Freedom Report for 2011*.
- US Congress Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Religious persecution in the Middle East, Faces of the persecuted*, 2010.
- US Department of State, *International religious freedom report for 2013, Burma*. Unpublished report, 2014: [www.uscirf.gov/countries/burma](http://www.uscirf.gov/countries/burma) [accessed 21st April 2015].
- Väisänen, Seppo S., *The Challenge of Marxism to Evangelical Christianity with Special Reference to Ethiopia*. PhD thesis. Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1981.

- van Braght, Thieleman J., *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians Who Baptized Only upon Confession of Faith, and Who Suffered and Died for the Testimony of Jesus, Their Saviour, From the Time of Christ to the Year AD 1660*. Translated from the Dutch by Joseph F. Stohm. Reprint edition. Scottsdale, PA: Herald 1950.
- Voice of the Martyrs, 'Rinaldy Damanik', in *Prisoner Alert*. 2004: [www.prisoneralert.com/pprofiles/vp\\_prisoner\\_127\\_profile.html](http://www.prisoneralert.com/pprofiles/vp_prisoner_127_profile.html) [accessed 23rd April 2015].
- Wagaw, Teshome G., *The Development of Higher Education and Social Change*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, 1990.
- Wang Zuonan, *The Religious Issues and Religious policy of China* (in Chinese). Beijing: Religious Cultural Press, 2002.
- Welde Giorgis, Andebrhan, *Eritrea at a Crossroads: A Narrative of Triumph, Betrayal and Hope*. Houston, TX: Strategic Book Publishing & Rights Co, 2014.
- Westpetal, Thomas J., *Martyrdom and the Furtherance of God's Plan: The Value of Dying for the Christian Faith*. PhD Dissertation. Chicago, IL: Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2005.
- Wikipedia, 'Pancasila (politics)', 2015: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pancasila\\_%28politics%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pancasila_%28politics%29) [accessed 23rd April 2015].
- Wilfred, Felix, 'Christians between Identity Politics and Nationalism: The Challenge of Hindutva', in *Aikyatha*, December 2001.
- Witte, John Jr. and Michael Bourdeaux (eds), *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia: The New War for Souls*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999.
- Witte, John (ed), *Christianity and Democracy in Global Context*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993.
- Women's League of Burma, *If they had hope they would speak*. Unpublished report, 2014. <http://womenofburma.org/if-they-had-hope-they-would-speak> [accessed 21st April 2015].
- Woodberry, Robert D., 'The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy'. *American Political Science Review* Vol. 106, No. 2 (May 2012): 244-74.
- World Council of Churches, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, World Evangelical Alliance, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World, Recommendations for Conduct, 2011*. [www.worldevangelicals.org/pdf/1106Christian\\_Witness\\_in\\_a\\_Multi-Religious\\_World.pdf](http://www.worldevangelicals.org/pdf/1106Christian_Witness_in_a_Multi-Religious_World.pdf) [accessed November 2014]
- World Council of Churches, 'Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes'. 2012. <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/mission-and-evangelism/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changing-landscapes> [accessed 23rd April 2015].
- World Population Review, 'Indonesia Population 2014'. 2014. <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/indonesia-population> [accessed 23rd April 2015].
- Yamamori, Tetsunao and Chan, Kim-kwong, *Witness to Power: Stories of God's Quiet Work in a Changing China*. Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2000.
- Yang, C.K., *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1961.

- Yang, Fenggang, *Religion in China: Survival and Revival Under Communist Rule*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Yunus, Yusran, 'Setia menemani korban tsunami Aceh'. *Bisnis Indonesia* (20th June 2005): 6.
- Zewde, Girma, *Ityopis*. Addis Ababa: Neged Matemia Bet.
- Zorilla, Hugo, 'Mission and Suffering: A Camouflaged Truth.' *Direction* 22:1 (Spring 1993): 73-80: [www.directionjournal.org/article/?789](http://www.directionjournal.org/article/?789) [accessed 21st April 2015].

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale



# LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

## The Editors

**Tormod Engelsen**, b. 1943. Cand Theol 1969, MF Norwegian School of Theology; PhD 1981, Aquinas Institute of Theology, Dubuque, Iowa; teacher, Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary, Ethiopia, 1971-1973; studied in USA, 1973-1976; teacher, Fjellhaug School of Mission, Oslo, 1976-1978; research fellow at MF Norwegian School of Theology, 1978-1983; associate professor in missiology, 1984-1998, and professor, 1998-2013; editor, *Norwegian Journal of Missiology*, 2006-2012; chair of Egede Institute for two periods; Moderator, Church of Norway Council for Ecumenical and Foreign Relations 1999-2003; member, Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, WCC, 1999-2005; member, Lausanne Theology Working Group, 1985-2000. Written several books and articles on mission, religion, the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement and spiritual conflict.

**Hans Aage Gravaas**, b. 1961. MTh, MF Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology, Oslo, 1987; studied Mission and Ecumenism at Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, 1989, and Amharic (Ethiopian) language at Joint Language School, Addis Ababa, 1990; PhD in Intercultural Studies, Trinity International University, Deerfield, Illinois, 1997; Field Chaplain, Norwegian Armed Forces, 1988; missionary to Ethiopia, seconded to Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), 1990-1993; Pastor, Norwegian Lutheran Memorial Church Chicago, 1993-1997; Mission Secretary, Africa, and Strategy Consultant, Norwegian Lutheran Mission, Oslo, 1997-2001; president, Gimlekollen School of Journalism and Communication, Kristiansand, Norway, 2001-2008; president, Fjellhaug International University College, Oslo, 2008-2013; Secretary General, Stefanus Alliance International, Oslo, 2013 till present. Contributed to several books and articles on media, communication, freedom of religious belief, education, religion, worldviews, theology and missiology.

Copyrighted Material

**Knud Jørgensen**, b. 1942. MTh, University of Copenhagen; PhD in Missiology, Fuller Theological Seminary; journalist and theologian – with Radio Voice of the Gospel, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Lutheran World Federation, Geneva; International Mass Media Institute, Kristiansand; Go out Centre, Hurdal, Norway; Norwegian Church Aid; Mekane Yesus Seminary, Addis Ababa; and mission foundation Areopagos; Dean, Tao Fong Shan, Hong Kong until 2010; adjunct professor, MF Norwegian School of Theology and Lutheran Theological Seminary, Hong Kong. Author of several books and articles on journalism, communication, leadership and mission. One of the Regnum Edinburgh 2010 Series editors.



**Maqsood Kamil**, b. 1965. Ordained Presbyterian pastor; pastor and executive secretary, Presbyterian Church of Pakistan; professor of theology and vice-principal, Gujranwala Theological Seminary, the oldest and only ecumenical theological institution in Pakistan; holds MDiv (Pakistan), MAR and DMin (USA); currently pursuing PhD at Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, UK.

**Christof Sauer**, b. 1963 in Germany. MTh and MDiv, Tübingen University; DTh in Missiology, University of South Africa; post-doc habilitation degree in Missiology, Protestant University Wuppertal/Bethel; pastor, missiologist, professor, researcher; librarian, Evangelical Middle East Ministries, Wiesbaden, Germany; pastor, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Württemberg, Germany, since 1993; career counsellor for theologians, Tübingen University. Since 2000, missionary with VDM seconded to LCA-SIM Research Centre on Islam, Cape Town 2000-2003; Academic Liaison Officer, GBEE (Network for Education and Research in Europe), University of South Africa, 2003-2008. Since 2006, co-director, International Institute for Religious Freedom (Bonn, Cape Town, Colombo). Within that capacity, Professor of Religious Studies and Missiology, Evangelical Theological Faculty, Leuven, Belgium; Professor Extraordinary, Stellenbosch University, South Africa; Honorary lecturer, Mission Studies/Intercultural Theology, Protestant University, Wuppertal, Germany. Published and edited several books and articles on mission theology and history, suffering, persecution, martyrdom and religious freedom; edits *International Journal for Religious Freedom*; convenes study group on persecution and religious freedom of International Association for Mission Studies. Based in Cape Town.

### Contributors

**Siga Arles** from Church of South India in Kolar Gold Fields. MDiv and MA, Asbury Theological Seminary, USA, 1975; teacher, South India Biblical Seminary, 1975-1988 – Principal during its Golden Jubilee period; PhD, University of Aberdeen, Scotland, as Langham Scholar; teacher, Serampore College; Senator, Vice-Principal and Registrar, North India Institute of Post Graduate Theological Studies; Dean of Consortium for Indian Missiological Education – a PhD centre for Missiology; helped set up Indian Institute of Missiology Research Centre. Currently Founder Director of Centre for Contemporary Christianity, Bangalore, India – a centre for renewal, a publishing house and research study centre, offering MA, MTh and PhD studies by extension to working laity, NGO and full-time Christian workers in missiology, holistic child development and other subject areas. Passed away in May, 2015.

**Ramez Atallah**, b. 1946. BSc 1966, MSW 1968, McGill University, Montreal, Canada; MDiv 1972, DD 2011, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, USA. With International Fellowship of Evangelical Students in Canada and Egypt. Since 1990, General Secretary, Bible Society of Egypt; seminar presenter, first Lausanne Congress 1974; youth representative, Lausanne Committee from 1975; committee member, 1975-1994; also assisted Chairman of the Committee, Dr Leighton Ford, eventually becoming a Deputy Chair, 1986. Program Chairman for Lausanne Cape Town 2010 Congress and in 2011 again appointed as a Deputy Chair of Lausanne.

**Bernd Brandl**, b. 1954. MDiv (equivalent), Freie Theologische Akademie, Giessen, Germany; Dr Theol, Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven, Belgium; pastor in Dortmund, 1974-1980; missionary, Neukirchen Mission in Indonesia and Tanzania; lecturer at Nassa Theological College, Tanzania, 1989-93; principal of Bible College, Liebenzell, Germany, 1996-2005; lecturer, theological seminary, Liebenzell Mission, 1997-2011. Since 2011 professor, International University for Applied Sciences, Liebenzell. Author of several books and articles on mission and church history.

**Felipe Carvalho**, b. 1994. Part of National Association of Evangelical Jurists in Brazil (ANAJURE). Bachelor of Law, Universidade Estadual da Paraíba, Brazil; member, ANAJURE Refugees Program, supporting refugees, welcoming them from Middle Eastern countries and North Africa. Author of several articles on religious liberty, human rights and national development.

**Kim-kwong Chan**, b. 1956. PhD, University of Ottawa; DTh, Pontifical St Paul University. Ordained minister, Christian National Evangelism Commission, North Asia Field; served as nutritionist, pastor, professor and chaplain; appointed Justice of Peace by Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government. Currently Executive Secretary, Hong Kong Christian Council. Published/co-published more than a dozen volumes and more than 60 academic articles/chapters in church history, religion in China, theology and sinology.

Copyrighted Material

**Lars Dahle**, b. 1961. Cand Theol, MF Norwegian School of Theology; PhD in Religious Studies, Open University, UK; theologian, apologist and educator; from 1991 served in academic, administrative and leadership roles, Gimlekollen School of Journalism and Communication, Norway; currently Vice-Rector of External Relations, Gimlekollen / Norsk Lærer Akademi University College; Vice-Rector and Associate Professor, Systematic Theology and Apologetics, NLA Gimlekollen; Lausanne Senior Associate for Media Engagement. Co-editor of *The Lausanne Movement: A Range of Perspectives* (Regnum 2014). Author of various academic and

popular articles, primarily on media and apologetics. Founding Editor, Nordic apologetic journal *Theofilos*; Steering Committee Member, European Leadership Forum.

**Yoel Ben David** has believed in Jesus since July 2001. Born in Israel but raised in Europe. Mother, Jewish, from Morocco; father, not Jewish, from Scotland. Speaks, reads and writes English, French and Hebrew fluently. Before becoming a believer in Jesus, Yoel David and wife Adel part of Hassidic Breslov movement; both served with Jews for Jesus for over nine years in Israel, UK and US. BA, Israel College of the Bible; MA in Jewish Ministry and Leadership, Western Seminary, USA. Currently in Israel as trainer to Israeli missionaries.

**Tibebe Eshete**, PhD, Michigan State University; historian on Horn of Africa and contemporary Christianity in Africa; teacher, Addis Ababa, Asmara University, Missouri State University, and Michigan State University; research co-ordinator, World Vision. Recent books include *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, *Jijiga: The History of a Strategic Town on the Horn of Africa*. Several publications on social, religious and youth-oriented movements.

**Brian J. Grim**, President, Religious Freedom and Business Foundation; PhD in Sociology, Penn State; formerly directed Pew Research Center's cross-national data project; leading expert on international religious demography and socio-economic impact of restrictions on religious freedom; scholar, Georgetown and Boston Universities. TEDx speaker; author of numerous works including *The Price of Freedom Denied* (Cambridge); *World Religion Database*, Brill.

**Wolfgang Häde**, b. 1958 in Germany. MTh (equivalent), Staatsunabhängige Theologische Hochschule, Basel, Switzerland; recent dissertation for DTh in Missiology, University of South Africa, about perceptions of Christians in Turkish newspapers; worked in Christian rehabilitation centre for people with drug problems, and later in church ministry among migrants in Germany. Since 2001, together with his Turkish wife, living and serving among Turkish Protestant churches in Turkey; theological teacher and tutor at Turkish branch of German-based Martin Bucer Seminary in Istanbul, Turkey. Author of *Faithful until Death: The Story of Necati Aydin, a Turkish Martyr for Christ*.

**Jeff Hammond**, born in Papua New Guinea and raised in Melbourne, Australia. Lived most of his life in Indonesia and currently a Senior Pastor, Abbalove Church, Jakarta; leader of a network with over 2,000 churches throughout Indonesia; established humanitarian foundation which helped resettle 56,000 victims of persecution, 2000-2008, and raised \$10 million to

help rebuild Aceh after 2004 tsunami. Academic studies have included University of Melbourne, Australia; Christian International, Florida, USA; University of Haifa, Israel; Institute for Arabic Studies, Sana'a, Yemen; and Kelsey Institute, Amman, Jordan; bachelor and doctorate degrees in Theology, Bachelor and Master's degrees in Arts, and a Diploma of Middle Eastern Studies.

**Dwi Maria Handayani** is from Indonesia; Deputy Dean of Academic Affairs (Biblical), Bandung Theological Seminary where a teacher since 2005; SE (Bachelor of Science), Universitas Katolik Widyakarya, Malang, Indonesia; MA, Bandung Theological Seminary; MTh, International Theological Seminary, USA, 2005. Currently doing PhD, Asia Graduate School of Theology, Manila, as Langham Scholar, and trainer at Langham Preaching Program in Indonesia.

**Richard Howell** lives in Delhi, born 1954, Firozpur, Punjab, India. BA (Hons) and MA from India, MTh from Canada, and PhD from the Netherlands; Principal, Allahabad Bible Seminary 1990-1996; 1997 became General Secretary, Evangelical Fellowship of India; 2008 additionally became General Secretary, Asia Evangelical Alliance; member, Global Christian Forum Committee.

**Cornelis Hulsman**, b. 1955. MA, Development Sociology, Leiden State University, Netherlands, 1984, with specialty in Islam and Middle Eastern Christianity. Correspondent with different (Christian) media in Egypt since 1994; founder and editor-in-chief, electronic magazine *Arab-West Report* since 1997; Affiliate-Assistant Professor of Mass Communication, American University in Cairo, 2000-2001; Secretary-General, Cairo Foreign Press Association, 2003-2009. Author of several books and reports and a substantial number of articles about Christianity, Muslim-Christian relations and media in Egypt.

**Maximilian J. Hölzl**, b. 1960. MPhil from and PhD candidate at University of Manchester, UK; MA in Missiology from Columbia International University, USA; further studies in Classical Languages and in Theology at Universities of Tübingen, Heidelberg and Greifswald, Germany. Theologian and translator; served as evangelist with EFG Passau and beyond; pastor and church-planter with Baptist churches in Stuttgart and beyond; lecturer and public relations officer with Voice of the Martyres (Germany); recently guest lecturer, Nepal Baptist Bible College and Kathmandu Institute of Theology. Author of book and several articles on missiology, church development, church history, and religious freedom and persecution.

**Jan A.B. Jongeneel**, b. 1938. Dr Jur, Utrecht University; ThD, Leiden University; ordained minister in Netherlands Reformed Church; teacher of systematic theology at two theological colleges in Indonesia 1971-1980; minister in a Reformed congregation, Leiden 1980-1982; lecturer, professor and honorary emeritus professor of Missiology, Utrecht University, since 1982; editor, *Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity* since 1987, visiting professor of Missions and World Christianity, Yale Divinity School, New Haven, USA, 2004; honorary life member, International Association of Mission Studies, 2008. Main publication: *Jesus Christ in world history: His presence and representation in cyclical and linear settings*, 2009; reprinted in India 2010.

**Hanna Josua**, b. 1956 in Lebanon. BA in Political Science, Islamic studies and history of Middle East; BTh, EFH, Ludwigsburg, Germany; Lizenziat in Evangelical Theology, Leuven, Belgium; DTh, Leuven; executive director, Evangelical Pastoral Work among Immigrants; member of several committees on interreligious dialogue, Evangelical Lutheran Church and German Evangelical Alliance; worked in several commissions on Faith Issues; ordained pastor, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Württemberg; ministering to Arabic-speaking churches in south Germany; external lecturer at high schools and academies of theology in Germany and in congregations interested in migration and Islam; Adjunct Professor for comparative studies at Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary, Amman.

**Valentin Kozhuharov**, MA in Linguistics 1987; MTh 1996; PhD in Christian Education 2001. Teacher at theological faculty in Bulgaria, 1996-2001; then missionary with Church Mission Society, Russia 2002-2009; freelance lecturer in Orthodox theology and missiology, and researcher in mission studies, youth and mission and inter-Christian relations; author of six books and some fifty articles in Bulgarian, Russian and English; taken part in over 100 international scholarly conferences, seminars, consultations, etc., with papers presented and many published; member of 15 international scholarly societies and examination committees on theology and missiology at several universities and theological colleges.

**Tore Lindholm** is Professor Emeritus, Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, University of Oslo, since 1988; associated from its start with Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief; trained as a philosopher, studied with Hans Georg Gadamer and written about the philosophy of science of Sir Karl Popper; member, steering committee, Norwegian Research Council's Ethics Programme 1990-2001; member, Church of Norway's human rights committee. Lead editor with Cole Durham and Bahia Tahzib-Lie of *Facilitating Freedom of Religion or Belief: A Deskbook*, Leiden, 2004. Current research on Islam, Christianity and other religions as they approach universal human rights.

**Daniel R. Mekonnen** is a Senior Legal Advisor at Oslo-based International Law and Policy Institute. Primary legal education in Eritrea, when also Judge of Zoba Maekel Provincial Court, Asmara. LLM in Human Rights and LLD in Public International Law, University of Stellenbosch and University of the Free State respectively; in addition to academic publishing, taught courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels; variously affiliated with Human Rights Centre in Gent University, Belgium; Swiss Institute of Comparative Law, Switzerland; International Victimology Institute (INTERVICT), Tilburg University, Netherlands; Irish Centre for Human Rights in Galway, Ireland; Felsberg Institute for Education and Academic Research, Germany; School of Law, Queen's University, Belfast; and Centre for Migration Law, University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland. Formerly, Co-ordinator of LLM Programme in Reproductive and Sexual Rights, University of the Free State, South Africa.

**Agne Nordlander**, b. 1939. MTh, MA and DTh in Systematic Theology, University of Uppsala; student secretary, Swedish Intervarsity Movement; Principal at Johannelund Theological Institute, missionary and teacher at Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; member, LCWE. Author of several books and articles on biblical and systematic theology and mission.

**Tim A. Peters**, b. 1950. BA *cum laude*, Michigan State University's Honor College in Multidisciplinary Social Science; overseas lay missionary worker in Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Argentina, American Samoa, Japan and Korea; high school teacher in US in early 1980s; missionary tent-making in Korea including language instruction as well as English editing and speech-writing for Korean Red Cross, Korean National Commission of UNESCO and Federation of Korean Industries; founded Helping Hands Korea, a Christian NGO, 1996, committed to practical and spiritual assistance of North Koreans in crisis; established in Seoul weekly Catacombs forum and Ecclesia worship to provide awareness, fellowship and solidarity with the persecuted and oppressed; presented testimony to US Congress on three occasions – 2002, 2004 and 2005 – relating to plight of North Korean refugees and orphans.

Copyrighted Material

**Uziel Santana**, b. 1976. President, National Association of Evangelical Jurists in Brazil (ANAJURE). Currently concluding PhD, Centre d'Etude des Normes Juridiques Yan Thomas of Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris, in joint supervision with Faculty of Law of University of Buenos Aires; Effective Professor, Federal University of Sergipe, where he teaches International Law, Constitutional Law and Human Rights. Author of several books and articles on law, religious liberty and human rights.

**Thomas Schirmacher**, b. 1960. PhD, DD; President, International Council of International Society for Human Rights; Ambassador for Human Rights, World Evangelical Alliance, speaking for c 600 million conservative Protestant Christians; chairs its Theological Commission; director, International Institute for Religious Freedom (Bonn, Cape Town, Colombo), the largest research network for religious freedom and persecution of Christians and others; professor of sociology of religion, State University of the West, Timisoara, Romania; Distinguished Professor of Global Ethics and International Development, William Carey University, Shillong, India; guest lecturer at many universities on all continents; regularly testifies in European parliaments and EU parliament in Brussels, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in Vienna and UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. His 92 books have been translated into 17 languages: latest are *Human Rights*, 2013, *Human Trafficking*, 2011, *Fundamentalism*, 2012, *Racism*, 2011, and two yearbooks on persecution of Christians and on religious freedom (in German).

**Peter M. Sensenig**, b. 1982. BA, Eastern Mennonite University; MDiv, Palmer Theological Seminary; PhD in Theology concentrating on Christian Ethics, Fuller Theological Seminary; CATS Scholar, De Pree Fellow, and Lewis Smedes Scholar at Fuller Seminary; Wilberforce Scholar for Faith and Public Policy, Palmer Seminary; Adjunct Professor, Fuller Seminary, 2011; lecturer, Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Hargeisa, Somaliland, with Mennonite Board East Africa. Author of articles on theology, ethics and peacemaking.

**Dan Sered** was born in Israel. At 14, family moved to New York. BSc in Mathematics, Stony Brook University, 1999; met Dinah, a Jewish believer in Jesus, who shared the Gospel with Dan, explaining that 'Jesus' in Hebrew is *Y'shua*, and showing Dan how the Hebrew Bible spoke of his coming. Dan committed his life to *Y'shua*. 1999, Dan and Dinah married and began serving as missionaries with Jews for Jesus; moved to Israel, 2000; appointed director of Jews for Jesus Israel, 2006; 2013, completed MA in Jewish ministry and leadership, Western Seminary, graduating *summa cum laude*.

Copyrighted Material

**David W. Shenk**, b. 1937. BA, Eastern Mennonite University (EMM); MA, New York School of Education; PhD, New York University School of Education; instructor and adjunct professor in a variety of seminaries and universities internationally as well as writing numerous books on themes related to Christian faith in a pluralistic world; served as an educationalist in Somalia, Kenya, Lithuania and USA with many engagements in other countries. Currently serving as global consultant with EMM with special focus on Christian-Muslim relations.



**James J. Stamoolis**, b. 1945. BS, Lehigh University; MDiv and ThM, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; ThD, University of Stellenbosch; missionary in South Africa, International Fellowship of Evangelical Students staff; Graduate Dean, Wheaton College; Executive Director, Theological Commission of World Evangelical Fellowship; CEO of The Wycliffe Seed Company; Senior Vice-President, Academic Affairs, Trinity International University; Adjunct, Northern Seminary, Columbia International University. Author of *Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology Today*, editor of *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism*. Contributor to missiological journals, dictionaries and encyclopædias.

**Kristin Storaker**, b. 1984. MSc in International Public Policy, University College, London; human rights advisor, Stefanus Alliance International, a human rights organisation with a focus on international freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), based in Oslo, with which she works in promotion and protection, focusing on religious minorities under pressure, most recently in Burma/Myanmar and South East Asia.

**Tite Tiénou**, b. 1949. MTh, Faculté Libre de Théologie Evangélique, Vaux-sur-Seine, France; MA in Missiology, Fuller Theological Seminary; PhD in Intercultural Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary; theologian with cross-cultural interests; founding director and Professor, Maranatha Institute, Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso; Pastor, Central Church of Christian Alliance Church, Bobo-Dioulasso; Professor of Theology and Missiology, Alliance Theological Seminary, USA; President and Dean, Faculté de Théologie Evangélique de l'Alliance Chrétienne, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire; Dean and Senior Vice-President of Education, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, USA, 2003-2015; currently Chair of Mission and Global Theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Published books and articles on mission, African theology, and academic leadership.

**Christian W. Troll** is Professor Emeritus, Graduate School of Philosophy and Theology of College of St Georgen in Frankfurt; also a scholar of Islam and key figure in Christian-Muslim relations; studied philosophy and theology at universities of Bonn and Tübingen before entering Jesuit Order in 1963; continued his education at School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; BA with honours in Urdu literature and, in 1975, PhD in Islamic studies; ordained a Roman Catholic priest, 1971; joined faculty of Vidyajyoti Institute of Religious Studies in New Delhi as a professor of Islamic studies, 1976; to Centre for Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations in Birmingham as senior lecturer, 1988; named professor of Islamic institutions, Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, 1993; appointed head of Christian-Islamic Forum, Catholic Academy in Berlin, 1991; named honorary professor at St Georgen, 2001; former member, Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims of Pontifical



Council for Interreligious Dialogue; currently, member, Sub-Commission on Interreligious Dialogue, German Bishops' Conference. In addition to papers published in academic journals, editor of seven books and author of four others.

**Kjetil Tronvoll**, b. 1966. Magister atriium research degree in social anthropology, University of Oslo; PhD in political anthropology, London School of Economics and Political Science; founding and senior partner, International Law and Policy Institute – an independent research and advisory company with headquarters in Oslo; also professor of peace and conflict studies, Bjørknes College, and professor of human rights, University of Oslo, until 2010; broad research expertise within governance, politics, conflict and human rights-related issues, as well as in-depth experience in African studies; has undertaken long-term anthropological fieldwork in Eritrea, Ethiopia and Zanzibar, in addition to shorter field studies in a dozen African countries. He has published nine books and dozens of articles and reports on issues of human rights, transitional justice, peace, reconciliation and conflict studies, democratisation and elections, political anthropology, and African studies.

**Frans Veerman**, b. 1962. MSc, Wageningen University, Netherlands; PhD student, Human Geography, Tübingen University, Germany; served in Christian rural development in Zaire (now DRC) and Mozambique; then director of Wycliffe Bible Translators' Dutch office, and consultant for Wycliffe Africa; political advisor, Netherlands Institute for Multi-party Democracy; currently director of World Watch Research Unit, Open Doors International.

**Annetta Vysotskaya**, b. 1960 in Russia, has lived in New Zealand since 2004. MA in Philology, and BA in Religious Studies, Far Eastern Federal University, Vladivostok, Russia; Dr Div, Vision International University, USA. Brought up as atheist, became a believer in 1992, actively involved in Christian ministry since. Pastor, Evangelical Christian Church of Vladivostok, Russia, 1997-2004; religious liberty journalist and theological educator. Her ministry focus is on Central Asia and other former USSR countries and she makes regular trips to that region. International director, Open Russian Theological Academy, since 2005; TEE Consultant for Central Asia from 2006; member, Religious Liberty Commission, World Evangelical Alliance from 2005. Author of many publications on issues of religious freedom and Christian persecution.

**Dietrich Werner**, b 1956. Ordained pastor, Lutheran Church, Northelbia, Germany; served as director of studies at missions academy, University of Hamburg; lecturer in missiology, ecumenism and world Christianity, University of Bochum and United Theological College, Bangalore, India;

director of Ecumenical Theological Education Program, WCC; currently serving as senior theological advisor, Bread for the World/Church development services in Berlin, and as honorary professor for missiology, ecumenism and development studies, University of Applied Science for Intercultural Theology, Hermannsburg, Germany.

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale

## INDEX

- Advocacy, 54, 325, 454, 457, 459  
 Ahmadiyah/Ahmadis, 346, 356, 359, 364, 365, 367  
 Al-Shabaab, 278, 396  
 Apologetics, 65, 66, 188, 388, 391  
 Arab nationalism, 174  
 Arab Spring, 33, 191, 196, 197, 198  
 Arab world, 195, 196, 199, 208, 210  
 Atheism, 73, 85, 312, 391  
 Athenagoras, 71, 72  
 Athnos, Gregory S., 77  
 Augustine, 6, 72, 73, 74, 77, 81, 84, 87, 88, 89, 219, 227, 229, 230, 231, 233, 235, 238, 239, 432  
 Bad Urach Statement, 47, 89, 457  
 Berber, 228, 230, 233, 234, 235, 237, 239, 240  
 Blasphemy, 209, 359, 364, 367, 369  
 Brazil, 34, 35, 41, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 408, 410  
 Buddhism/Buddhists, 124, 125, 129, 284, 286, 321, 332, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 344, 373, 376, 415, 427, 430, 436, 440, 443  
 Buddhist nationalism, 335, 341  
 Burma, 32, 119, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 339, 340, 341, 342  
 Byzantine Empire, 168, 236  
 Catholic, 6, 13, 14, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 34, 74, 81, 82, 86, 88, 90, 94, 95, 110, 112, 149, 152, 157, 158, 160, 173, 190, 192, 200, 201, 203, 204, 208, 211, 230, 233, 234, 235, 236, 248, 260, 261, 266, 267, 268, 285, 295, 296, 340, 342, 346, 378, 380, 381, 401, 404, 405, 407, 421, 422, 439, 448, 462, 463  
 Central Asia, 119, 124, 125, 141, 148, 194, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 320  
 Chalcedon, 115, 167, 236  
 Children, 348  
 China, 31, 37, 65, 66, 104, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 124, 125, 126, 135, 154, 245, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 299, 300, 301, 302, 304, 305, 306, 307, 372, 421, 439  
 China Christian Council (CCC), 118, 285, 287, 288, 289, 290, 292, 294  
 Christology, 62, 442  
 Church-state relations, 243, 262  
 Civil public square, 390, 392  
 Columbia, 434  
 Commission of Inquiry (COI), 266, 298, 299, 300, 303  
 Communism, 21, 163, 312, 372, 378  
 Constantine, Constantinian, 65, 67, 73, 75, 79, 80, 81, 83, 84, 86, 87, 90, 91, 114, 153, 233, 430, 435, 436  
 Constitution, 4, 18, 20, 96, 174, 179, 207, 215, 218, 276, 278, 284, 324, 330, 336, 344, 345, 356, 357, 358, 360, 369, 377, 379, 395, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 403, 405, 406, 409  
 Convention on the Status of Refugees, 299  
 Conversion, 145, 323, 461  
 Coptic Church, Coptic history, 114, 115, 116, 191, 239, 240, 262  
 Council for the Co-operation of Churches in Ethiopia, 248  
 Crusades, 6, 64, 88, 116, 123, 125, 173, 183, 184, 186, 219, 436, 437, 441  
 Cuba, 135, 396, 406, 407, 409  
 Cyprian, 73, 80, 81, 82, 227, 231, 232, 233, 238  
 Democratisation, 20  
 Deobandi, 357  
 Derg, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 249, 251, 252, 254, 255, 257

- Discrimination, 9, 47, 122, 338, 344, 347, 382, 383, 393, 395, 403, 452, 463
- Donatus, Donatist church, 69, 88, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236
- DPRK (North Korea), 116, 118, 124, 135, 136, 142, 265, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 415
- Eastern Mennonite Mission (EMM), 270
- Egypt, 36, 38, 70, 72, 73, 114, 115, 116, 121, 122, 124, 135, 167, 168, 169, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 177, 178, 179, 180, 191, 192, 194, 195, 196, 207, 208, 210, 211, 227, 228, 229, 230, 236, 239, 240, 367, 397
- Eritrea, 121, 135, 142, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 415
- Ethics, 15, 20, 25, 39, 122, 149, 154, 458
- Ethiopian Evangelical Mekane Yesus Church, 242
- Ethiopian Orthodox Church, 115, 242, 248, 249, 262
- European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), 3, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 32, 380, 384, 385, 394
- Eusebius, 67, 69, 72, 74, 75, 76, 83, 435, 472
- External freedom, 9
- Freedom of religion or belief, 34, 36, 38, 39, 118, 310, 382, 410, 416, 425
- Freund, W.H.C., 67, 69, 70, 74, 75, 88, 231, 232, 233
- Fundamentalism, 161, 486
- Gaza, 204, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 226
- Global Charter of Conscience, 387, 390
- Global Christian Forum, 287, 462, 463
- Haile, Ahmed Ali, 242, 244, 245, 247, 251, 264, 276, 280, 281
- Hinduism/Hindus, 32, 124, 129, 321, 322, 326, 327, 328, 329, 336, 344, 356, 364, 365, 367, 427, 430, 433, 440, 443
- Horn of Africa, 260, 271
- House churches, 117
- Human rights, 4, 16, 17, 93, 98, 109, 370, 461, 464
- India, 7, 32, 41, 67, 106, 109, 110, 116, 119, 123, 124, 125, 135, 152, 153, 154, 159, 162, 194, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 329, 330, 356, 421, 427, 432, 436, 440, 441, 443
- Internal freedom, 9
- Intolerance, 9, 382, 385, 393, 395
- Iran, 135, 142, 192, 193, 194, 196, 205, 207, 208, 211, 427, 461
- Iraq, 32, 40, 42, 112, 113, 114, 116, 135, 142, 145, 177, 183, 190, 191, 192, 194, 195, 196, 199, 200, 201, 211, 367, 396, 415
- Islam (*see also Muslims*), 24, 32, 85, 109, 115, 116, 119, 121, 124, 125, 129, 153, 155, 160, 163, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 176, 177, 179, 184, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 199, 200, 201, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 215, 216, 218, 222, 227, 228, 233, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 261, 262, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 279, 280, 284, 286, 310, 311, 312, 316, 321, 324, 329, 333, 336, 344, 346, 347, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 364, 367, 368, 369, 376, 385, 387, 401, 413, 414, 415, 417, 430, 443
- Islamic Courts Union, 279
- Islamic invasion, 236, 239
- Israel, Israelis, 59, 82, 135, 154, 177, 193, 196, 204, 205, 214, 215, 216, 217, 219, 222, 223, 224, 225, 337, 428, 434, 443
- Jacobites, 119, 121
- Japan, 119, 120, 126, 372
- Jenkins, Philip, 115, 116, 119, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 189
- Jews, Jewish, 19, 21, 23, 32, 60, 69, 72, 75, 88, 90, 116, 121, 123, 167, 170, 171, 173, 203, 205,

- 214, 216, 219, 220, 221, 222,  
223, 224, 225, 226, 229, 237,  
334, 428, 432, 434, 435, 444  
Jordan, 135, 191, 199, 200, 204, 205  
Justice, 218, 324, 362, 365, 402,  
405, 406  
Justin Martyr, 7, 71, 75, 122, 188  
Kale Hiwot Church, 242, 246, 248  
Kyohwaso, 298  
Lament, 51  
Laskar Jihad, 350, 351  
Lebanon, 135, 191, 196  
Legislative restrictions, 313  
Love, 154, 366  
Maghreb, 228, 240  
Maier, Paul L., 67, 472  
Martyrdom, martyr, 47, 48, 51, 54,  
56, 58, 59, 62, 63, 64, 65, 67, 69,  
70, 72, 74, 75, 77, 83, 84, 88, 89,  
116, 118, 120, 123, 183, 434,  
443, 444, 445, 463  
Marxism, Leninism, 123, 242, 243,  
247, 250, 256  
Mennonites, Mennonite  
missionaries, 101, 242, 250, 251,  
252, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274,  
275, 276, 277, 278, 280, 281,  
311, 402  
Meserete Krestos Church, 242, 250,  
254  
Messianic Jews, 214, 223  
Mexico, 104, 135, 143, 396, 403,  
404, 409  
Migration, 121, 313, 365, 460, 485  
Minorities, 122, 203, 206, 291, 331,  
345, 356, 358, 363, 395, 463  
Mission, 26, 43, 44, 47, 48, 49, 51,  
52, 54, 56, 66, 67, 83, 85, 92, 93,  
94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101,  
102, 103, 104, 105, 107, 108,  
109, 111, 116, 117, 118, 122,  
149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 155,  
157, 158, 159, 183, 187, 229,  
230, 231, 234, 239, 240, 243,  
245, 246, 252, 259, 263, 270,  
278, 283, 292, 294, 309, 310,  
317, 318, 330, 331, 336, 354,  
366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371,  
374, 377, 380, 383, 388, 389,  
391, 392, 413, 414, 418, 419,  
425, 426, 430, 438, 439, 444,  
445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 452, 458  
Missionaries, 107, 122, 181, 244,  
262, 304, 308, 329, 380, 433  
Monasteries, monks, 32, 119, 122,  
262, 268, 311, 335, 336, 337,  
339, 372  
Mongols, 116, 119, 121, 123  
Monophysite, 236  
Mullah, 356  
Mulu Wongel Church, 242, 248  
Muslim Brotherhood, 174, 175, 177,  
178, 194, 195, 367, 413  
Muslim(s), 12, 17, 21, 23, 31, 37,  
43, 85, 108, 110, 115, 116, 118,  
119, 121, 122, 123, 125, 132,  
139, 146, 153, 154, 159, 163,  
167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172,  
173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178,  
179, 180, 182, 183, 184, 185,  
186, 190, 191, 192, 194, 195,  
197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 203,  
204, 205, 207, 208, 209, 210,  
211, 212, 213, 215, 216, 217,  
218, 226, 227, 228, 236, 237,  
238, 239, 240, 244, 261, 270,  
271, 273, 274, 275, 276, 278,  
279, 280, 281, 313, 314, 315,  
316, 317, 322, 326, 328, 329,  
331, 333, 341, 342, 344, 346,  
347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352,  
354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359,  
360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 366,  
367, 368, 369, 373, 378, 385,  
387, 413, 415, 417, 427, 436,  
437, 440, 441, 461  
Muslim-Christian relations, 167,  
169, 173  
Myanmar, 135, 331, 332, 335, 336,  
342, 415  
Nagasaki, 120  
National Service Programme, 264  
Nationalism, 123, 193, 325, 334, 341  
Nestorian, 114, 116, 119, 125, 311,  
318  
Non-discrimination, 9  
North African church, 227, 230, 231,  
235, 236, 238, 239, 240  
North Korea, 116, 118, 124, 135,  
136, 142, 265, 295, 296, 297,

- 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303,  
304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 415
- Orthodox Jews, 222, 223, 226
- Orthodox, Orthodoxy, 13, 20, 21,  
22, 24, 43, 58, 114, 121, 124,  
128, 150, 158, 160, 167, 168,  
169, 172, 176, 184, 188, 198,  
202, 203, 204, 216, 222, 223,  
224, 225, 226, 236, 261, 262,  
263, 265, 268, 284, 315, 371,  
372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377,  
378, 379, 380, 381, 385, 436,  
439, 462, 463
- Ottoman Empire, 183, 184, 185,  
186, 439
- Pakistan, 31, 41, 108, 124, 135, 142,  
194, 211, 356, 357, 358, 359,  
360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365,  
366, 367, 368, 369, 437
- Palestine, Palestinians, 216, 217, 226
- Pancasila, 344, 477
- Parliamentary Assembly of the  
Council of Europe (PACE), 382,  
383, 385, 392, 393
- Patriarch Timothy, 122, 125
- Peace, 4, 5, 18, 19, 24, 28, 41, 42,  
159, 160, 177, 185, 186, 192,  
270, 276, 357, 358, 401, 402,  
469, 475, 481
- People's Front for Democracy and  
Justice (PFDJ), 265
- Perpetua, 72, 75, 229, 475
- Persecution engine, 129
- Persia, 116, 119, 122, 124, 125, 311
- Peru, 135, 396, 404, 405, 409
- Polycarp, 72, 75, 76, 77, 122
- Power, abuse of power, 15, 65, 92,  
217, 218, 279, 320, 389, 434,  
448, 449
- Provocation, necessary/unnecessary,  
431, 432, 433, 435, 436
- Public theology, 464
- Rabbis, 223
- Real violence and Symbolic  
violence, 397
- Religious freedom, 22, 27, 29, 104,  
352, 364, 395, 406, 408, 427,  
443, 459
- Religious intolerance, 314
- Religious Liberty Partnership, 458,  
462
- Religious restrictions, 39
- Religious Revival, 123
- Respect, 40, 410
- Roman Catholic church, 58, 82
- Roman Empire, 6, 71, 81, 82, 83, 86,  
88, 89, 189, 228, 230, 235, 421,  
434, 435, 436
- Russian Orthodox Church, 22, 311,  
315, 372, 375, 377, 379
- Seljuk Turks, 116, 119
- Solidarity, 25, 122, 160, 325, 334,  
360, 402, 403, 406, 452, 454
- Somalia, 121, 135, 142, 209, 211,  
270, 271, 272, 274, 275, 276,  
278, 279, 280, 281
- Somalia Mennonite Mission (SMM),  
270
- Soviet Union, 42, 194, 225, 246,  
277, 312, 370, 371, 374, 375, 380
- State, 13, 15, 17, 31, 41, 43, 59, 103,  
149, 193, 198, 200, 201, 204,  
215, 217, 222, 223, 243, 246,  
247, 259, 260, 284, 296, 300,  
302, 304, 323, 327, 331, 332,  
336, 340, 344, 365, 366, 369,  
372, 375, 376, 379, 403, 405,  
406, 415
- Suffering, 54, 56, 60, 61, 83, 88, 89,  
116, 120, 123, 169, 368, 436,  
444, 445, 446, 448, 450, 451
- Sunna/Sunnites, 197, 205
- Syria, 40, 112, 114, 115, 116, 119,  
121, 125, 135, 142, 145, 190,  
191, 192, 194, 197, 201, 202,  
211, 236, 367, 396, 397, 421
- Syrian churches, 114
- Tertullian, 7, 54, 66, 67, 69, 120,  
227, 229, 230, 231, 233, 303
- Three-Self Patriotic Movement  
(TSPM), 118, 283, 285, 287, 288,  
289, 290, 292, 294
- Trinity, 2, 48, 71, 125, 154, 445
- Truth, 24, 59, 187, 383, 388, 391,  
448
- Tsarist Russia, 124
- Tumsa, Gudina, 65, 245, 247, 248,  
249

Turkey, 12, 116, 124, 135, 181, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 193, 194, 201, 202, 203, 204, 210	West Bank, 204, 205, 215, 217, 218, 223, 226
Unity, 53, 56, 107, 154, 362, 426, 452	Witness, 25, 53, 54, 56, 79, 84, 86, 87, 88, 91, 110, 117, 149, 152, 157, 158, 249, 256, 264, 309, 310, 430, 438, 439, 444, 446, 449, 452, 453, 454, 458
Vandals, 230, 234, 235	
Wang Ming Dao, 122	

For personal use only - not for sale

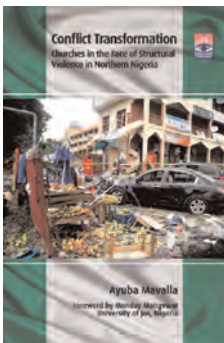
For personal use only - not for sale

# Regnum Studies in Mission

The Regnum Studies in Mission series is born out of the lived experience of Christians and Christian communities-in-mission, especially in the fast growing churches among the poor of the world. These churches have more to tell than just stories of growth. Their work is making a significant impact in shaping their cultures in the power and image of Christ. Through Regnum, these practitioners are expressing the reality of the Christian faith as it is manifested in their societies and making the work of God known, globally.

Titles in the Regnum Studies in Mission series are the fruit of rigorous research to the highest international standards. They demonstrate authentic Christian engagement that has led to the transformation of people and societies. These books are designed to impact the world, as the formation of Christian theology, missiology, and practice in the twenty-first century will depend to a great extent on the active participation of growing churches. Through Regnum, these ministries will be able to contribute biblically faithful and culturally appropriate expressions of Christian practice.

*Volumes in this series are printed in paperback, unless otherwise stated.*



## **Conflict Transformation: Churches in the Face of Structural Violence in Northern Nigeria**

*Ayuba Mavalla*

2014 / 978-1-908355-60-7 / 278pp

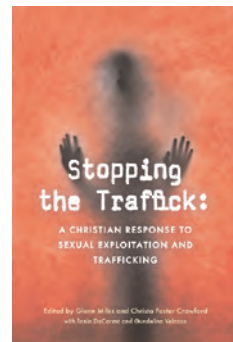
Both Christian Missionaries and Indigenous Christians believed that their fundamental role is evangelism. However, the provision of education and health services are often done as an opening wedge for the Gospel. Rarely do the Christians perceive these development projects as means of transforming structural violence.

## **Stopping the Traffick: A Christian Response to Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking**

*Glenn Miles and Christa Foster Crawford (Eds)*

2014 / 978-1-908355-51-5 / 318pp ([eBook available](#))

How do we even begin addressing such an important – and yet overwhelming – task? If you are a practitioner striving to assist victims or a faith-based organization wondering how to get involved you may be wrestling with questions like: How should we go about working with exploited people? Where should we focus our response? How do we deal with the challenges?

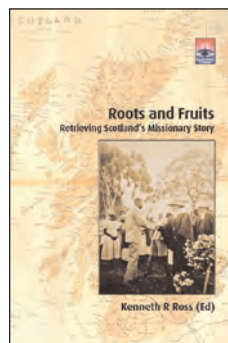




**Roots and Fruits:**  
**Retrieving Scotland's Missionary Story**  
*Kenneth R Ross (Ed)*

2014 / 978-1-908355-29-4 / 173pp

Scotland has played a major role in the worldwide movement of Christian mission. Equally, the missionary movement has played a big part in Scotland's story. The distinctive contribution of this book is its attempt to offer a comprehensive and synchronic assessment of the movement as a whole



**Called Out for Witness : The Missionary Journey of Grace Korean Church**

*Daniel Taichoul Yang*

2014 / 978-1-908355-49-2 / 170pp

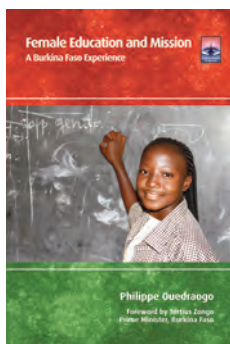
This book investigates the theological motivation for GKC's missions: Reformed theology, Presbyterian theology, and mission theology. The book also shows the extent of the church's mission engagement by continents. Finally, the book turns its attention to the future with an evaluation of the church's missionary journey.

**Mangoes or Bananas?: The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology (2nd Ed)**

*Hwa Yung*

2014 / 978-1-908355-47-8 / 232pp ([eBook available](#))

Over the past few decades there has been a growing awareness of the need for contextual theologies throughout Asia. Based on the premise that theology and mission are inseparable, the author applies four missiological criteria to representative examples of Protestant Asian writings to assess their adequacy or otherwise as contextual theologies.



**Female Education and Mission**  
**A Burkina Faso Experience**

*Philippe Ouedraogo*

2014 / 978-1-908355-11-9 / 263pp

This volume is the result of six years research in 'Overcoming Obstacles to Female Education in Burkina Faso'. It narrates how Christians and religious groups can speed up female education and contribute to the socio-economic growth of Burkina Faso. The evidence from this research shows that Christianity is part of the solution to female education, a key factor of socio economic growth.

For personal use only - not for sale

For personal use only - not for sale



Christian mission takes place in a world with increasing interreligious tensions, including violence and persecution. Politics, economics, religion, ethnicity and other factors play a role in these tensions. Christians too are involved in such conflicts, sometimes as those who are persecuted and sometimes as those participating in violence. 'Freedom of religion and belief' is a core value in the UN Human Rights Declaration. At the same time it is a core biblical value. Obstacles to and attacks on freedom of belief are therefore a central concern for witnessing to Christ. The purpose of this volume on *Freedom of Belief and Christian Mission* is to bring to public attention a broad overview on the history, development and perspectives on the role of mission and freedom of belief and to reflect on these issues within a context of authentic witness in mission.

*Timely, enlightening and encouraging. This volume comes at a time when the Churches are faced with new challenges to religious freedom. Their response however needs to be grounded in an objective study of what is at stake, as well as of why and where these difficulties are arising. The present collection of essays offers a very useful reflection on the entire question. And it does so in a way that invites Christians to courageous witness to the Gospel with respect for the dignity and freedom of all.*

Bishop Brian Farrell, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Vatican City

*Some of the best minds in the church, including some outstanding grassroots workers, have joined to present not only the challenges facing the church on the religious freedom issue but also guidelines to how respond wisely to it. The challenges are complex and call for serious thought. This book will serve the church well by pointing to informed, wise and bold responses.*

Ajith Fernando, Teaching Director, Youth for Christ, Sri Lanka

*Without reservation I commend this vital resource to global reflective practitioners engaged in missional issues of religious freedom of belief and persecution. It reflects depth (from foundational chapters to thoughtful case studies to missiological responses), breadth (writers reflecting the worldwide orthodox Christian community church) and relevance to both Global South (the obvious), but also the Global North (where the attacks come from militant secularism and politics, the courts and education, popular culture and media). This seminal work equips us all for the future.*

William D. Taylor, Senior Mentor of Mission Commission, World Evangelical Alliance and lead editor of *Sorrow and Blood: Christian Mission in Contexts of Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom*, 2012



[www.stefanus.no](http://www.stefanus.no)

Tormod Engelsviken is Professor Emeritus at MF Norwegian School of Theology  
Hans Aage Gravaas is Secretary General of Stefanus Alliance International, Oslo.  
Knud Jørgensen is Adjunct Professor at the MF Norwegian School of Theology.  
Maqsood Kamil is Professor of Theology and Vice Principal at the Gujranwala Theological Seminary, Pakistan.  
Christof Sauer is Professor of Religious Studies and Missiology at ETF in Belgium, Co-Director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom and based in South Africa.



[www.ocms.ac.uk/regnum](http://www.ocms.ac.uk/regnum)



[www.edinburgh2010.org](http://www.edinburgh2010.org)