

Researching persecution and martyrdom

Part 1. The external perspective

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Abstract

Persecution and martyrdom can be viewed from a human rights/religious freedom perspective or from a Christian theological perspective. The author presents current research, outlines various research questions and points to academic disciplines which do or could pursue these: Why do the world religions and worldviews persecute Christians? (Religious Studies); What types of persecution are there? (Social Sciences); How can country profiles on persecution be developed? (Social Sciences); Where are Christians persecuted most today? (Geography for Mapping); How can the intensity of persecution be measured? (Sociology of Religion); What global trends can be observed in religious persecution? (Political Sciences and Futures Studies); Can martyrs be counted? (Statistics of Religion). To be continued with a theological part.

Keywords Definitions, typology, criteria, measurements, country profiles, mapping, indexes, trends, statistics

1. Perspectives, definitions and distinctions

1.1. Topic and perspective

Violations of religious freedom worldwide are massive, widespread and, in many parts of the world, intensifying. ... attention to and action on religious freedom have been comparatively weak; ... the important role of religion in conflicts and in political orders has been comparatively neglected; ... both these situations are now beginning to change.

(Marshall 2008:11)

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The fuller story of the contemporary persecuted church remains a tragically untold story. We hear too much of the deliverance stories of the few and not enough about the endurance stories of the many. There is a grander, greater narrative of God's action underneath the stories of individual pain, suffering, deliverance, and endurance ... Those who seek to assist the persecuted all too often end up using them rather than serving them. We must understand the dynamics of contemporary persecution better to ensure more effective intervention and assistance ... Western Christians require an encounter with the persecuted church to recover essential insights into their own faith, especially the biblical truth that there is no such thing as a nonpersecuted believer.

(Boyd-MacMillan 2006:13-16)

Above quotes stem from two seminal books on religious freedom and the persecution of Christians. As far as perspective is concerned, there is a world of difference between these quotes, though, when it comes to Christians, the authors might be referring to the same people and issues. The first quote comes from a human rights and religious freedom perspective. With it a leading human rights researcher summarizes the essence of a global survey on *Religious Freedom in the World* conducted by a centre for religious freedom. The second quote contains the underlying convictions of the author of a book subtitled *The Essential Guide to the Persecuted Church*. It has been co-published by an advocacy and support agency for persecuted Christians and aims at educating the church.

This article on researching persecution and martyrdom finds itself between these two poles. With Marshall, I share the academic approach, a concern for scholarly methodology and an appreciation of the potential that research tools of various academic disciplines have to contribute to the issue. With Boyd-MacMillan, I share a Christian theological perspective and the focusing on the Christian church.

Let us pause for a moment and reflect on the role of the International Institute for Religious Freedom of the World Evangelical Alliance. This institute connects researchers globally who in some way or another are researching and teaching on religious freedom and particularly the suffering, persecution and martyrdom of Christians. What is the distinguishing mark of this institute in comparison to other existing agencies which provide help and advocacy to persecuted Christians, such as Barnabas Fund, Open Doors or Voice of the Martyrs, to name just a few, and networks such as the Religious

Liberty Partnership? I would like to explain this using the “Three Worlds Framework” of sociologist Johan Mouton (Mouton 2001:137-142). From the perspective of the sociology of science three different levels of reflection on the world can be distinguished. The scholar should distinguish in which “world” he is operating:

- World 1 is the world of everyday life and lay knowledge guided by pragmatic interests.
- World 2 is the world of science and scientific research interested in knowing.
- World 3 is the world of meta-science guided by critical interest: How can one do science?

The advocacy agencies and the Religious Liberty Partnership largely operate in World 1: How can we help persecuted Christians? Some of them might also touch on World 2, but their guiding interest is not scholarly, but that of documenting and reporting, in the way journalists do. The IIRF wants to complement this daily business of fundraising advocacy agencies and non-fundraising networks by researching the issues surrounding the suffering, persecution and martyrdom of Christians. The IIRF therefore is operating in World 2 when asking: ‘What can we know about it?’ and in World 3 with the question: ‘Can it be researched at all?’ and ‘How can it be researched?’ So this article will focus on Worlds 2 and 3, on science and meta-science.

My background is that of a protestant evangelical theologian ordained in a Lutheran church and that of a missiologist. My own dealing with the topic started about 20 years ago during my theological studies and eventually resulted in a book in German entitled ‘Mission and Martyrdom’ (Sauer 1994). Because of that background I was invited onto the Issue Group ‘The persecuted church’ of the 2004 Lausanne Forum in Pattaya, Thailand. At present I am working on a post-doctoral research project on theologies of martyrdom of evangelicals in the non-western world.

When formulating the title of this article it was obvious to me that I wanted to use persecution and martyrdom as Christian concepts with Biblical roots. But I oscillated between ending the title with either “... of Christians” or “... from a Christian perspective”. Both are correct in a way but neither of them fully covers the contents of this survey of research on religious persecution. I do indeed look at things

“from a Christian perspective”, but I also report on other perspectives, albeit always with a Christian interest. I do indeed narrow down my focus to the issue of persecution and martyrdom “of Christians”, particularly in the latter half of the article. This is my first limitation. However, I do also report on research, which is broadly concerned with religious persecution in general and not that of Christians only.

Two further limitations have to be stated: This article tries to focus on persecution and martyrdom of Christians for Christ’s sake in contrast to many other possible reasons for martyrdom and persecution of Christians. And while much research is focused on persecution and martyrdom of Christians in distant history, my interest lies in the present and the recent past.

I will complete my introduction to this article by defining the key terms suffering, persecution and martyrdom, and by distinguishing two perspectives. The second part of the article will deal with researching the external perspective on persecution and martyrdom and the third part with researching the internal perspective of the subject. In closing, I will dwell on the necessity of a martyrology for church and mission.

1.2. Definitions of suffering, persecution and martyrdom

The first challenge for research is that of definitions. How do we define suffering, persecution and martyrdom? Are the definitions developed by sociologists sufficient, or do we need specific Christian and theological definitions? Can agreement be achieved about definitions – at least among Christians? Boyd-MacMillan (2006:89) maintains: “No consensus exists about the correct use of the term persecution, and probably there will never be one.” That might equally apply to the other terms, as there is always a tension between broad and narrow definitions. For the Christian and theologian the question also arises to what degree the biblical use of the terms is normative for today and how a Christian definition of these terms might be maintained in the context of their widely secularized use. These questions challenge the researcher to review the definitions that have been proposed and to determine which of those are the best and most useful. My task here is to point to relevant research and to determine how the terms in question are defined for the purposes of this article.

Concerning the term persecution, it makes sense to me to follow Charles L Tieszen until discussion has progressed further. He has probably most thoroughly pursued a definition of persecution in recent times in his MTh dissertation in missiology of 2005 at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. This dissertation on a theological framework for understanding persecution has now been published. He argues for the following general and comprehensive definition of persecution as “any unjust action of varying levels of hostility with one or more motivations directed at a specific individual or a specific group of individuals, resulting in varying levels of harm, as it is considered from the victim’s perspective” (Tieszen 2008:41).

Based on this general definition, he develops a more specific theological definition of religious persecution of Christians, which narrows down three aspects: it is the persecution of Christians, it is religious persecution and the definition is theologically defined.

This is Tieszen’s theological definition of the religious persecution of Christians:

Any unjust action of mild to intense levels of hostility, with one or more motivations, directed at Christians of varying levels of commitment, resulting in varying levels of harm, which may not necessarily prevent or limit these Christians’ ability to practice their faith or appropriately propagate their faith, as it is considered from the victim’s perspective, each motivation having religion, namely the identification of its victims as ‘Christian’, as its primary motivator (Tieszen 2008:48).

I am not aware of any equally detailed research on definitions of suffering for Christ or martyrdom as used in contemporary language. Therefore, the following represents only my current definition for the purposes of this article.

When speaking about suffering, I mean suffering because of being a Christian, things that Christians experience who are persecuted as defined above. This kind of suffering is different from many other possible types of suffering which Christians may experience along with other human beings, or because of professional risks (Sauer 1994:53; Sookhdeo 2005:68).

Martyrdom is a term I use contrary to secularised usage solely for the singular and unrepeatable act of giving one’s life for Christ. In this I follow the definition of David Barrett in the World Christian Encyclopedia. A martyr – in this article – is defined as „A believer in

Christ who has lost his or her life prematurely, in a situation of witness, as a result of human hostility“ (Barrett 2000:I,665). The situation of witness might be understood broadly as the confession of one’s faith or the refusal to deny it or a particular teaching, principle or behaviour pertaining to it (Barrett, WCE 1st ed: 833). This is a narrow definition in the sense that it reserves the use of the term martyr for those who have actually lost their lives for their witness or identity as a Christian, excluding those whose suffering has not resulted in death. I am aware that the use of the Greek term ‘martyrs’ in the New Testament and in first century Christian usage as a proper title does include the latter. Therefore Christians who speak about the ‘church of the martyrs’, in a broad sense meaning the ‘persecuted and suffering church’ cannot be denied doing so. However, for the sake of clear terminology in academic language, I personally prefer the narrower definition, because it helps to distinguish more clearly between martyrdom on the one hand, and being persecuted and suffering for Christ on the other. This is open for debate and invites thorough research.¹

1.3. The distinction between internal and external perspective

The renowned German practical theologian Manfred Seitz (2005:405) distinguishes in his recent essay “Martyrdom in protestant theology” the inside and the outside aspect of martyrdom: “The outside can be described when one learns about it. To present the inside is impossible as human words fail.” He brings this to the point with a quote from his own teacher Eduard Steinwand characterising martyrs as: “Abandoned by God, isolated among men, and delivered to demonic powers”.

This distinction between the inside and the outside of martyrdom has inspired me in the structuring of my article. I modify it slightly, however, and distinguish between researching the external perspective of the persecution of Christians by non-theological sciences and researching the internal perspective by the various disciplines of theological science. Potential contributions by the various sciences are highlighted in an exemplary manner while pursuing some of the challenges for research.

¹ I thank Glenn Penner, CEO of Voice of the Martyrs in Canada, for engaging me on this point.

2. Researching the external perspective

Some of the most obvious questions for research regarding persecution and martyrdom are those to which non-theological sciences can contribute important insights from an external perspective:

1. Why do the world religions and worldviews persecute Christians?
2. What types of persecution are there?
3. How can country profiles on persecution be developed?
4. Where are Christians persecuted most today?
5. How can the intensity of persecution be measured?
6. What global trends can be observed in religious persecution?
7. Can martyrs be counted?

By scrutinizing existing research on these issues, I try to indicate which sciences might be the first to turn to for answers to each question. Obviously, reality and the field of competence of various sciences can never be neatly divided in practice. The point I am trying to make is that these various sciences can help us understand religious freedom and the persecution of Christians better. The sciences I name, religious studies, social sciences and sociology, geography, political sciences, futures studies, statistics, are but examples representing a whole range of non-theological sciences. The readers will certainly be quick to mention law, economic sciences and many others. The following are just some examples where I have some research at hand.

2.1. Religious Studies: Why do the world religions and worldviews persecute Christians?

Most religions and world views have a 'mission' in the sense that they are seeking their self-preservation and expansion. This provides them with a rationale for in some way persecuting adherents of competing world views, foremost Christians. Carefully scrutinizing representative publications of their proponents and interpreting them in light of the meta-centres of the respective religion will form part of my post-doctoral research project on 'missio religionum and martyrdom'. I hope to show the relationship between the 'mission' of a religion or worldview and its persecution of adherents of another, or in contrast, the willingness to suffer martyrdom because of its

‘mission’. Understanding the inner motivations and sensibilities of adherents of another religion might in some instances help to avoid unnecessary offence in inter-religious encounter and thereby needless suffering. The same applies to Christian denominations which, at times, oppress Christians with a different creed.

2.2. Social Sciences: What types of persecution are there?

Barnabas Fund (2006) has tried to classify loosely “the main difficulties which Christians living as a minority can face”. They have come up with 10 types of persecution:

1. Societal discrimination
2. Institutional discrimination
3. Employment discrimination
4. Legal discrimination
5. Suppression of Christian mission activity
6. Suppression of conversion to Christianity
7. Forced conversion from Christianity
8. Suppression of corporate worship
9. Violence against individuals
10. Community oppression

Not all of them occur in every Christian minority situation. But these terms seem, indeed, useful descriptors from a Christian perspective. The concentration on the most common types of persecution and the experience of minority Christians helps to focus on widespread phenomena. If, however, one is seeking a comprehensive catalogue of types of persecution from a scholarly perspective, there is a need to go beyond the minority example. One needs to include the experiences of persecution of non-minority Christians and make the survey globally representative and move beyond the most common types of persecution. Coming from such a perspective, one might ask Barnabas Fund whether they had started out with a fuller list of types of persecution, and how they arrived at the 10 most common types. This is where the social sciences could come in handy.

2.3. Social Sciences: Profiling persecution

The basis for above typology could be provided by the assessment of persecution in various countries. How could such country profiles be developed? Looking at the websites of the most reliable Christian advocacy organisations one does indeed find either country specific collections of news items or fully developed country profiles. In the ideal case all profiles from the same agency follow consistent descriptors and criteria. Others have attempted to compile a series of country or regional profiles in books, highlighting at least some of the worst situations (Shea 1997) or trying to give a representative impression of global persecution (Marshall 1997, Boyd-Macmillan 2006). Up to now such books were most often the work of individuals, drawing on human rights reports, or material from Christian advocacy organisations, including anecdotes and news items. A novelty in this regard was the collaborative effort of the issue group “The Persecuted Church” at the 2004 Forum held in Pattaya, Thailand, by the Lausanne Movement for World Evangelization. It consisted of 40 individuals from at least 18 countries, some from contexts of persecution themselves and others serving in ministries that serve the persecuted church. The resulting *Lausanne Occasional Paper* No.32 edited under the guidance of Patrick Sookhdeo (2005) is possibly the most internationally representative document concerning the persecuted church, though it is far from comprehensive. None of the above global surveys are scholarly in the stricter sense, though they contain references and bibliographies.

A more scholarly approach from a religious freedom and human rights perspective was implemented by Paul A. Marshall in the compilation of 75 country profiles by the Center for Religious Freedom then still at Freedom House, published in 2000 as *Religious Freedom in the World*.² A checklist of criteria originally developed by Willy Fautré of Human Rights without Frontiers (www.hrwf.net) was adapted and expanded. The checklist attempts to summarize the various possible dimensions of religious freedom and broadly follows the criteria set by international human rights standards. In 2008 Marshall edited the latest massive global survey on *Religious*

² The two editions of the World Christian Encyclopedia did of course provide profiles on every country of the world, including sections on human rights and freedom as well as church and state. However this is by far not as detailed as the country profiles in *Religious Freedom in the World* 2008.

Freedom in the World, with the team of the Center for Religious Freedom now at the Hudson Institute, providing 101 country profiles, thereby covering 95% of the world's population. The range of questions for country experts has been expanded, adding more questions on the economic dimensions such as job discrimination. For a complementary check of the situation with a different methodology additional questionnaires developed by Brian Grim (see below) have been used. The approach of the book *Religious Freedom in the World* represents a real scholarly quantum leap. Different from the earlier books is the focus on religious freedom in general instead of solely on the persecution of Christians in particular. The country profiles were written by a whole team of authors and further processed in a cooperative manner. They follow clear definitions of the issues, and the authors operated with a published set of criteria for a coherent narrative and a quite comprehensive set of questions on the infringements of religious freedom rights. The "Checklist of Elements of Religious Freedom ..." (Marshall 2008:451-476) contains between 4 and 29 different questions on each of the following categories, making a total of 122 questions:

1. Individuals' right to freedom of conscience
2. Freedom of worship
3. Freedom of clergy
4. Right of self-government by religious bodies
5. Freedom of religious education and instruction
6. Right to social participation
7. Equality/non-discrimination of individuals
8. Equality/non-discrimination of communities and institutions
9. Religious and economic freedom
10. Incitement against religious groups

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

that further work on a comprehensive set of descriptors of persecution from a Christian theological perspective is needed.

2.4. Geography: Mapping persecution

Another useful approach of portraying a global picture of persecution is the expression in the form of maps. A look at various websites of Christian advocacy agencies reveals a variety of approaches.³ Usually the main purpose of printed maps is to provide a visual reminder to pray for and with those suffering for their faith in Christ. The simplest approach is highlighting on a world map the countries where the worst persecution occurs. This is useful online when it is designed as an interactive interface to click on for more detailed information on a specific country (Release International 1) or when it provides this information on the map itself (Release International 2), which works best when it splits into separate maps for various regions of the world (Barnabas Fund). A next step is differentiating among the countries highlighted. One of the ways to differentiate is according to major persecuting religions, or worldviews and other reasons for persecution (Release International 3). Some also differentiate by highlighting the areas of specific campaigns, or where they are at work. Another way to differentiate is according to the degree of persecution. Voice of the Martyrs Canada only distinguishes two categories, restricted and hostile nations, while Open Doors Germany uses three shades of red according to the intensity of persecution. Unfortunately they do not mention the definitions (which do exist on their World Watch List). The International Day of Prayer (IDOP) defines four degrees of persecution⁴, while CSI works with a remarkable scale of 7 degrees of

³ These are the websites where maps were found:

- Barnabas Fund <http://tinyurl.com/5cmmje> (World maps of persecution)
- CSI http://www.csi-int.org/world_map_religious_liberty.php
- IDOP 2008. www.idop.org/map.pdf
- Open Doors Germany www.opendoors-de.org/downloads/persecde.pdf
- Release Intl. 1 <http://tinyurl.com/6jjbhm>
- Release Intl. 2 Global Overview 2008 <http://tinyurl.com/6g8uoa>
- Release Intl. 3 <http://tinyurl.com/5tcdv4>
- VOM Canada www.persecution.net/images/wallpaper/prayermap320.jpg

⁴ 1. Life can be difficult for Christian minorities and harsh for converts. 2. Christian minorities suffer systematic discrimination and persecution. 3. Persecution of Christian minorities is pervasive and severe. 4. Historically Christian ethnic minorities at risk of genocide.

violation of religious liberties⁵. A further step in differentiation found on the IDOP map is the adding of keys to various countries according to the source of persecution⁶ and the majority religion associated with it, if this is relevant. In that respect the IDOP map is most complex as it combines degree of persecution, source of persecution and majority religion. In addition it provides the best geographical differentiation. It moves beyond national entities on the map itself, by cutting through national boundaries with its different degrees of persecution. (As is done by some others, however, only for some countries). Barnabas Fund does without degrees of persecution, but provides a highly differentiated picture by adding various icons according to the ten types of persecution (as in 2.2) to each of the textual mini-country profiles on their map. Obviously such a degree of complexity can hardly be visualized on a map itself. This overview of some common practices might give an impression of the complexities in mapping persecution.

What are the scholarly challenges in mapping persecution? In order to be reliable sources of information such maps should fulfil some minimum requirements. The presentation must be based on well-researched data. The various differentiations must be well defined and explained on the map itself. A combination of several dimensions comes closest to complex reality and adds to the usefulness of the map. A geographical differentiation beyond national entities is helpful, but cannot be easily displayed for geographically small nations. But it might e.g. be necessary to highlight the different situation of the Montagnards in Vietnam. Also, presenting countries with huge areas and populations such as China and India through one single colour code lacks differentiation, which might be necessary. Solutions could lie in more detailed separate maps of such areas. The means of mapping are not exhausted with the maps currently available. This becomes clear if one compares them with maps

⁵ Non or only minor violations of basic religious liberties, Some violations of basic religious liberties, Various violations, sometimes serious, of basic religious liberties, Violations of basic religious liberties, Frequent violations – sometimes serious – of basic religious liberties, Frequent serious violations of basic religious liberties, Continuous very serious violations of basic religious liberties.

⁶ T=Totalitarian, Halfmoon=Islamic State (Sharia Law), N=Religious Nationalism, W=War, civil/sectarian/ethnic conflict, lawlessness, extreme insecurity.

Where Christians are Persecu

Map Key

DEFINITION

Religious Liberty:
The right to worship and practise the religion of your choice in private and in community, including the right to witness and evangelise, and the right to convert, i.e., to change your religion.

In Islamic states, Sharia (Islamic) Law is the supreme source of law. The severity of persecution depends on the degree to which Sharia (Islamic) Law is implemented. Sharia increases Islamic zeal and codifies inequality and religious apartheid, resulting in discrimination and persecution of religious minorities.

This map describes the religious liberty situation for nationals (and not for expatriates).

Key

- T** Totalitarian
- C** Islamic State (Sharia Law)
- N** Religious Nationalism
- W** War, civil/sectarian/ethnic conflict, lawlessness, extreme insecurity

Majority Religion:

- B** Buddhist
- H** Hindu
- M** Muslim
- Ca** Catholic
- Or** Orthodox



**Praying for and with
those suffering
for their faith in Christ**

uted

- Life can be difficult for Christian minorities and harsh for converts.
- Christian minorities suffer systematic discrimination and persecution.
- Persecution of Christian minorities is pervasive and severe.
- Historically Christian ethnic minorities at risk of genocide.

ith International Day of Prayer (IDOP)
for the Persecuted Church

www.idop.org
www.idop.in
World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission

produced by Global Mapping International on other issues.⁷ For scholarly purposes it would be of interest to relate degrees of persecution to various other types of variables in a set of maps, which each overlay persecution with one other factor. Thus the intensity of persecution could be related to the population figures/density and the number of Christians in these countries and areas, or to the degree of poverty, etc. The same might be done on country level. On a country level one might also map reported incidents during certain periods. All this could lead to a number of useful insights which might not be easily gained from columns of raw data alone. Often comparing maps with different variables gives additional insight. In summary, there is a potential use of maps in researching persecution that goes far beyond the popular reminder for prayer.

The geographical presentation of the intensity of persecution leads to the next question, how in fact the intensity of persecution can be measured.

2.5. Sociology: How can the intensity of persecution be measured?

The map of Open Doors referred to above is based on their annual World Watch List (Open Doors 2008). According to it, the strongest persecution of Christians in 2007 occurred in the following countries: North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Maldives, Bhutan, Yemen, Afghanistan, Laos, Uzbekistan and China. All in all, the list includes the 50 countries with the worst persecution record. They are grouped in five blocks according to the severity of persecution: Severe persecution (1 country), oppression (7 countries), severe limitations (19), some limitations (22), some problems (1 only, because the list cuts off after 50 countries). In addition to annual scores, trends and the deviation from the previous year's score are given.

This is how the list is constructed: "The World Watch List is compiled from a specially-designed questionnaire of 50 questions covering various aspects of religious freedom. A point value is assigned depending on how each question is answered. The total number of points per country determines its position on the WWL [World Watch List]. The questions differentiate between the legal, official status of Christians (e.g. Does the constitution and/or national

⁷ www.gmi.org

laws provide for freedom of religion?; Are individuals allowed to convert to Christianity by law?) and the actual situation of individual Christians (Are Christians being killed because of their faith?; Are Christians being sentenced to jail, labour camp or sent to a psychiatric hospital because of their faith?). Attention is paid to the role of the church in society (Do Christians have the freedom to print and distribute Christian literature?; Are Christian publications censured/prohibited in this country?) and to factors that may obstruct the freedom of religion in a country (Are Christian meeting places and/or Christian homes attacked because of anti-Christian motives?).“

This is how far the questions are made public. The rest of the questions and the formula used to arrive at the number of points for a specific country are not common knowledge nor are they validated in a scholarly manner. Therefore, with all due respect to the seriousness and meticulousness of this effort, it misses some of the marks of scholarly research.

This is different with the Restriction of Religious Freedom (RRF) Index that Brian J. Grim developed in a Master of Arts in Sociology thesis (Grim 2004) and a subsequent doctorate at Pennsylvania State University (Grim 2005). He develops a scientific measurement for religious freedom and a global index. The substantive thesis of his research maintains that religious freedom is most powerfully restricted by socio-religious pursuits of (other) religions. The legal/policy regulation of religion by countries is largely a reaction to those socio-religious pursuits.

The RRF Index is composed of two sub-indexes each on a scale of 1-18. The first is a measure of Socio-Religious Protectionism. The second is an index of the Legal/Policy Restriction on religion by the government. Grim explains:

Religious freedom is negatively affected by both the inequitable regulation of religion by governments and the protectionist actions of religious brands in societies. A measure of religious freedom today must pay equal attention to both of these factors in order to more accurately reflect the actual ability of people to freely choose and/or maintain their religious brand affiliation (or no affiliation) without fear or abuse. Freedom for the majority to do what they want is not the measurement provided. Rather, the RRF is a measure of the restriction of freedom that various religious brands in a country experience.

Grim worked with quantitative data on international religious freedom from his coding of the reports on 196 countries covered in the US State Department's 2003 annual *International Religious Freedom Report*.

In 2006 Grim and Finke presented a slightly varied set of three religion indexes: Government Regulation of Religion Index (GRI), Government Favouritism of Religion Index (GFI), and Social Regulation of Religion Index (SRI). As far as I understand the new feature is the differentiation between negative and positive attitudes of an individual government towards different religious brands expressed through regulation or favouritism. As Marshall explains:

The GRI measures state restrictions on the free practice of religion, including not only whether the constitution provides for religious freedom but also whether the government interferes with an individual's right to worship, forbids foreign and/or local missionaries to work in the country, or restricts proselytizing, public preaching, or conversion. The GFI measures the degree to which a religion is favored or established and whether there is bias in government subsidies and privileges provided to religious organizations. It also includes measures on whether the government funds religious education, buildings, clergy, media, charities, practices, and/or mission work. Aside from state actions, religious freedom can also be significantly restricted by social groups and organizations. The SRI measures whether existing or established religious groups try to monopolize the religious landscape and shut out new religions as well as discourage other faiths from proselytizing. It also assesses whether societal attitudes toward nontraditional religions and conversions to other religions are negative. (Marshall 2008:445).

The same questions used by Grim to code the US State Department's 2003 report were then used by the country experts writing the surveys for *Religious Freedom in the World* (Grim in Marshall 2008:495). So there are now two data sets (Grim 2004 and Marshall 2008) available for all countries and independent territories based on the same methodology of mathematically calculating scores on the basis of a specific set of questions. Grim attests "a high degree of correlation between the two independent efforts [which] provides grounds for confidence in these indexes."

A different methodology was used to establish the Religious Freedom scores in *Religious Freedom in the World* (Grim in Marshall 2008:498) on a scale of 1-7 as earlier established by Marshall 1997:

They were “assigned by country experts by referring to a broader set of questions that consider the number of restrictions on religious freedom, the gravity of those restrictions, and the severity of the penalties for transgressing them.” (see checklist referred to in 2.3). These scores then went through a fourfold refinement process, first by the country experts themselves, internally comparing these scores with the scores they themselves had given to other countries, then by independent country profile readers, then by editorial staff and advisors on groups of comparable countries, and finally through the agreement of the original country expert with the final score. The scale used previously by Marshall 2000 in analogy to Political Rights and Civil Liberties scales of Freedom House ranges from 1 to 7. The score of 1 signifies a high level of religious freedom, 7 indicating a lack thereof. The other scores do not seem to be defined. However the countries with a score of 1 to 3 are classified as “free,” 4 to 5 as “partly free,” and 6 to 7 as “not free” (Marshall 2008:3). Grim sees a “high level of association between what is measured in the three indexes and the overall religious freedom score” (:498).

The above represents an obvious progress in the measuring of religious freedom. My comment is analogous to that above on profiling persecution, namely whether the criteria are comprehensive enough in all cases for measuring the persecution of Christians from a Christian perspective, or whether a Christian theological perspective needs to be added. As there are cases which Christians consider as persecution from a theological perspective that are not infringements of religious freedom according to international human rights standards, it is likely that further work on a comprehensive set of descriptors of persecution from a Christian theological perspective is needed. In addition there is a question mark about the data basis used. The goal from my perspective should be to apply these sociological instruments also to the material from Christian sources in order to arrive at a scholarly validated Christian Religious Freedom Index. The annual World Watch List of Open Doors has already taken steps in that direction since the emergence of Grim’s initial research.

Comparing annual country profiles and scores from the same source can indicate trends, as well as improved and deteriorated situations (Open Doors 2008). These could be amalgamated to regional or continental trends, as well as to a global trend in scores. A

different approach is looking at major phenomena in relation to persecution on a global scale.

2.6. Political sciences and futures studies: What global trends can be observed in religious persecution?

The World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission is issuing annual Religious Liberty Trends. The most recent was issued on 29 March 2008 and is focusing firstly on apostasy, apostaphobia and postmodernism, and secondly on the New Cold War (WEA RLC 2008). What is behind these terms and how do they relate to religious freedom?

Apostates are people who convert away from some faith or system. The term is used by those remaining inside. From the perspective of Islam apostasy is one of the greatest sins, punishable by death in the hereafter, but many hold also by death in this world. The global phenomenon observed in 2007 is that apostates from Islam are standing up. They are forming councils of Ex-Muslims in various Western countries and the first Egyptian born Muslim sued Egypt's Ministry of Interior for his right to leave Islam and to follow the religion of his choice.

Apostaphobia "may be defined as a consuming, well-founded fear of loss of adherents, which manifests primarily as zealous, uncompromising repression and denial of fundamental liberties – in particular the right to convert – by violent or subversive means." It is driven by political ambition and manifests almost exclusively amongst leaders and beneficiaries of sects or organisations that do not separate religion and politics: Islam, Hindutva and various other religious-nationalist forces.

As apostasy advances, the apostaphobic dictators of Islam will intensify persecution with the aim of consolidating fear to stem the flow. The West has been turning its back on Islam's victims. "Even in the Church, Islam's victims, in particular persecuted and subjugated Christians, are frequently rejected, betrayed and abandoned by Christians pursuing comfortable stress-free, feel-good religion; as well as by those pursuing appeasement or rapprochement with Islam at any cost."

Postmodernism has a crippling effect on the support of persecuted Christians: "... because postmodern Christians believe that

the truth is relative, they have a really hard time supporting or even caring about Christians who are prepared to suffer and die for it.”

The **New Cold War** is a power struggle between three blocks: The NATO, the SCO (the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation between China, Russia and Central Asia) and the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Conference, which includes the Sub-Saharan states that, while not OIC members, have sold their independence to Libya’s Colonel Muammar Ghaddafi). Various negative consequences for religious freedom for Christians, particularly in the Middle East are outlined.

These issues should be researched in detail by Christian political scientists and futurists who care about religious persecution.

2.7. Statistics of religion: Can martyrs be counted?

As we go along the questions get tougher. There are radically opposed views on the question whether martyrs can be counted and how many martyrs there are. I will in an exemplary manner present the views of the editors of the World Christian Encyclopedia, Barrett and Johnson on the one hand and German theologians Seitz and Schirmacher on the other. Manfred Seitz wrote (2005:406 translation CS): “It is part of the nature of martyrdom that it is in the twilight and can be misinterpreted. ... Most of the martyrs suffer and die anonymously, unknown and forgotten. Nobody can report about them, nor give any figures.” So Seitz is making a theological statement by saying: “Nobody can give the number of martyrs.”

The statisticians of religion David B Barrett and Todd M Johnson give a very different impression by presenting various figures on martyrs based on the World Christian Database in the World Christian Encyclopedia (WCE, 2001) and in the companion volume World Christian Trends (WCT, 2001) and various dictionary articles (Dictionary of mission theology 2007; Encyclopedia of missions and missionaries 2007). Most impressive is the ‘Martyrology – The demographics of Christian martyrdom, AD 33-AD 2001’ on 40 folio pages of 3 columns in fine print (WCT 2001:225-264). They claim there is a total of 70 million martyrs for 20 centuries of Christian history, depicting the 76 worst historical situations of martyrdom with over 100.000 martyrs each and 500 major martyrdom situations above 100 martyrs per situation, growing to 600 situations as they go below 100 martyrs per situation. In addition a representative list of the 2250

best known martyrs is displayed alphabetically, chronologically, and geographically. A host of definitions and statistics is provided on the diverse variables surrounding martyrdom.

So in answer to the question of this section, Barrett and Johnson say “Yes, martyrs can be counted”. Let us then ask the question: “How many Christian martyrs are there per year?”. According to Barrett and Johnson the current trend lies at a global total of 160,000 martyrs per year (WCT 2001:231). Many have queried whether this is a reliable figure, and many find it exaggerated. How is it calculated? It is the sum total of national figures. Therefore the national figures of annual martyrs would need to be scrutinised, which eg. are given as 192 for Germany, 23 for Austria, and 20 for Switzerland.

Thomas Schirrmacher, the Director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom comments: “I have checked some of these figures in more detail and I found them untenable. In the case of Germany these figures would mean that from 1950 to 2000 we would have had 9600 martyrs. I am not aware of any in West Germany and even in East Germany one martyr per annum would be my highest guess, because many were incarcerated but few executed. What strikes me is that the figures for the free countries are often much higher than eg. those of Saudi Arabia (2) or Mongolia (1). The figure for Iran for example is less than half of that of Germany”.

Todd Johnson explained the figures in WCE in the following way: “The figure includes an estimate of 'background martyrdoms' in undocumented situations (individual, domestic, family, isolated) eg. a person involved in shady dealings becomes a Christian and is murdered by his partners when they are threatened by his desire to confess and thus expose them as well. It should be noted that background martyrs make up 10% of our totals. This figure represents an annual average of individuals who died as martyrs in this country from AD 1950 to AD 2000.”⁸

As Johnson’s explanation only accounts for 10% of the national figures, it does not sufficiently answer Schirrmacher’s queries. It does, however, shed some light on the fact that these figures are in fact projected averages or statistical guesses rather than hard figures. The

⁸ E-mail of 2006 archived by T Schirrmacher. The only part of this explanation which I did not find in World Christian Trends itself was the fact that country totals are annual averages.

attempts by the IIRF to assemble a group of experts to work on a more realistic estimate have so far been unfruitful.

Conclusion

Researching suffering, religious persecution and martyrdom of Christians for Christ's sake is a multifaceted and enormous challenge. Hopefully the International Institute for Religious Freedom will be able to make a significant contribution to some of these issues. But those issues are more numerous and some are larger than any individual, group or institute might be able to tackle. Therefore we are glad to learn about anyone else who is studying these issues and to network with them.

(To be continued with Part 2 on 'The internal perspective')

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