

on a request by a Christian representative, Alexander Andries Maramis. Until today, extremist groups in Indonesia are fighting for the inclusion of that provision.

It is extremely important for the international community to monitor the drafting of the constitutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and elsewhere, as well as propose and lobby for full religious freedom and safeguards against any loopholes that could be used at a later stage to introduce restrictions on the rights of minorities and other citizens.

It's an overwhelming reality that the foundation of the ideological direction of several countries will be laid in the coming months. We must rise up to the occasion.

## A response to the high counts of Christian martyrs per year

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For many years one number has been provided every year to report on the annual number of Christian martyrs. This is provided by the “Status of Global Mission.” The number is quoted by various institutions but only produced by one institution. At present it is most frequently quoted by the papal missions agency “Aid to the Church in Need”. It reports 130,000 – 170,000 martyrs per year but does not conduct any of its own investigations.

This number is released every year in the *International Bulletin for Missionary Research*.<sup>2</sup> In 2010 the number stood at 178,000, for 2009 176,000,<sup>3</sup> and for 2011 it was corrected to 100,000.<sup>4</sup> As it is an annually changing number, people think it is the number of martyrs of the given year, but actually it is said to be the average number per year of the last full decade (eg 1990-2000, 2000-2010).

The commentary provided with the “Global Status of Mission” itself indicates that this number is the most quoted figure from this table.<sup>5</sup> A number of this magnitude is widespread through the books *World Christian Encyclopedia*, *World Christian Trends*, *Atlas of Global Christianity* and the electronic *World Christian Database*.

I find it difficult to criticize this number on account of its widespread use, particularly due to the fact that it comes from reputable researchers and good friends. However, as an academic I have too often had to answer for such numbers before

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<sup>2</sup> www.internationalbulletin.org.

<sup>3</sup> “Status of Global Mission, 2011”, see <http://ockenga.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/globalchristianity/resources.php>.

<sup>4</sup> “Status of Global Mission, 2011.” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35 (1011) 1: 29, line 28; cf. Commentary “Christianity 2011: Martyrs and the Resurgence of Religion.” *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

secular colleagues, politicians around the world, the German or European parliament, and journalists to just allow our institute (the International Institute for Religious Freedom) simply assume them.

Since by many secular, Christian, and among them also Evangelical<sup>6</sup> researchers and specialists the figure is 1. viewed to be too high, and 2. on the basis of numerous factors viewed to be a number that cannot even be collected, it would be desirable to have a precise account of the basis of comprehensive research upon which the number is compiled. Furthermore, it would be desirable to know which scientific standards are followed in the process and how research colleagues' conformity can be reviewed. All of this is not available – even the comprehensive presentation in *World Christian Trends* nowhere mentions the source of the data and which criteria were used in producing the estimates.<sup>7</sup>

But in the present media landscape in which we find ourselves, it is natural that someone with even a roughly estimated number has an advantage over an individual who says that the number cannot be reliably estimated at the present time.

### **The role of civil wars**

According to the reports of its authors, the figure of 156,000 – 178,000 martyrs per year is an average number per year for the ten years 1990-2000.<sup>8</sup> In the process one has to recognize - without its being expressly stated - that the vast portion of the 1.6 million martyrs over a period of 10 years comes from the civil wars in southern Sudan and in Rwanda. Let us suppose one were to use even a broader definition of Christian persecution (“martyrs in the widest possible sense”<sup>9</sup>). Still, the extent to which Rwanda can be included at all, and the share of deaths in Southern Sudan that can be traced back to the persecution of Christians by Muslims and not seen either affecting animists or originating with brutalizing southern Sudanese parties to the civil war, is at least disputed.

For the ten-year period 2000-2010, southern Sudan and Rwanda no longer count. The mammoth share of the amount of 10 x 100,000 comes under the civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Admittedly there were many Christians who died there, but that they died *because* they were Christians is not something that is defended by anyone in the literature. Let us suppose that there were 900,000 martyrs estimated for the DRC. The remaining 100,000 martyrs per year over 10 years would then move one far closer to an exceedingly lower number.

<sup>6</sup> Eg. <http://www.persecution.net/faq-stats.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> David Barrett, Todd Johnson. *World Christian Trends*. Pasadena (CA): WCL, 2001. chapter 16.

<sup>8</sup> “Christianity 2011: Martyrs and the Resurgence of Religion.” *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

What I criticize above all is that nowhere is the composition of the figure presented according to countries. This would allow the main countries to be recognized and discussed, eg Congo. It would then be especially easy to see the one or two countries to which the high number could be traced back. I also criticize the fact that no discussion about these one or two difficult-to-classify-situations can occur.

Not every Christian who dies in a civil war like one in the Congo can simply be counted. An estimate is made about which portion of the Christians killed actually died as martyrs. This share then has to be discussed and justified. But instead of this, nowhere can it be found which portion was estimated, much less how the estimate was made. All that is said is that it is “a substantial proportion” of the 5.4 million in the Congo. A 10% increase in the number of martyrs in the Congo, however, would translate into an increase of the total number of 100,000 by 54,000 martyrs, a jump of over 50%! If 10% less than the unknown percentage in Congo were to be estimated, that would be 54,000 fewer annually, which means that the figure would shrink by over 50% from 100,000 to 46,000! This means that de facto the entire number of martyrs worldwide is decided by the estimate of the share of martyrs found among the victims of unrest in Congo.

### **Regarding definition**

I see a general contradiction between the definition given by the Status of Global Mission, that martyrs are “believers in Christ . . . in a situation of witness,” and the statement of “defining and enumerating martyrs in the widest possible sense.”

An intra-Christian, theological definition will always be much tighter than a sociological one. As a sociologist of religion, I definitely see that a very broad number may be chosen that does not take into account whether the murdered Christian is a baby, a poor excuse for a churchgoer, or a sectarian of some sort. I personally consider the “situation of witness” to be unnecessary. If a church is blown up in Egypt and 20 people are killed in the process, this is considered Christian persecution even if the 20 people killed were only interested guests.

My broadest political definition would be the following: “Christians who are killed and who would not have been killed had they not been Christians.” However, even if this definition is used as a basis, I would by far not come up to the 170,000 or 100,000 Christian martyrs per year.

### **More than 50 martyrs a day?**

Events where 20 or 50 Christians killed are nowadays not only widely reported on in the Christian world. Rather, in some countries such as Germany this would as a rule even appear on the front page of newspapers. Experts who deal with the question of the persecution of Christians hear about this in any case. No one would say

that this happens every day. However, even if we assume that there is an event with 50 murdered Christians every day, that would amount to an annual number of only 18,250. Given 20 murdered Christians per day would be 7,300 – a number which I consider more realistic.

It might be pointed out that there have been and are events that generate a higher yearly average than 50 per day. Indeed that is true, but these are individual events spread out over years. I know of the following countries for which this applies in the recent years: Indonesia, India, Iraq, and Nigeria. The point is that these events hardly overlap with each other. Stated otherwise: In years past these horrible events have occurred selectively within a period of 1-3 years and in the years thereafter were superseded by other main events in other countries. Again stated alternatively: As a general rule, an event with more than 100 Christian martyrs in a country occurs one time a year somewhere in the world.

The strange numbers that arise when one simply makes a rough estimate is demonstrated when a grading is made in the 'World Christian Database' countries according to the annual number of martyrs, whereby the average over the last 50 years was taken (beginning in 1960).

In Denmark and Finland there are said to be 15 martyrs per year, while in Sweden there were 19, in Switzerland 20, in the Netherlands 39, in Australia 45, in Canada 76, in Great Britain 149, and, believe it or not, in Germany 192. In all of these Protestant countries, there are no known martyrs and under no circumstances 50 times the number given since 1960.

That the high numbers are difficult to comprehend and are traceable to liberal estimates of the share of Christian martyrs killed as a result of warfare and civil war also applies to the numbers for historic cases. Were there really 1,000,000 martyrs at the hands of the National Socialists? No researcher of National Socialism (among whom I count myself with two dissertations) would attest to that. Admittedly there were millions of Christians who died in World War II, not, however, because they were persecuted as Christians. Among true Christian martyrs are those Christians who were killed on account of their Christian resistance or as clerics or representatives of religious communities. Their destiny has been thoroughly researched, their stories have been recorded in biographical encyclopedias, and a curriculum vitae is available for almost every such individual. This notwithstanding, there is still a total of only a few thousand and not 1 million.

### **Are there so many martyrs among the dead in civil wars and other warfare?**

I want to make one further comparison which leads me to believe that both numbers, the 170,000 and the 100,000, can be questioned. According to statistics of the

World Health Organization, there were 184,000 victims of warfare and civil war in 2004.<sup>10</sup> And the number of martyrs is supposed to be just as large, without experts' immediately being able to list the cases which comprise these numbers? One can list all warfare and civil war in a year and make it clear how this number of 184,000 victims is composed. If the number of martyrs is just as large, how can the events not be likewise listed and added together more or less in one's head? How does it happen that far too few large events come to mind even to the experts which would be able to explain the high numbers?

### **On the road to researching an actual number for a previous year**

How high, then, is the actual annual number of Christian martyrs? I have occupied myself with this for years and have probably discussed this with every known expert from all large denominations and beyond who has anything to say about it. Let me put to one side for the time being the sheer difficulty of producing a definition of "martyr". Even if a concrete definition is set, experts strongly differ with respect to individual countries. Were the 'missing Christians' of North Korea killed decades ago or are they still living in camps and currently being killed?

If one asks for the total number worldwide, practically no one wagers an estimate. Additionally, everyone agrees that an average is confusing. Rather, the number of martyrs strongly fluctuates from year to year. For that reason the number has to be newly ascertained every year. Anyway, whoever hears a statistic for 2010 assumes that this is not an average value for 1990-2000, but rather that some institution has concretely researched the number for 2010 and has documented or at least has realistically estimated it on the basis of reports.

Overall I am of the opinion that we are far from having a reliable report of the number of martyrs annually. The International Institute for Religious Freedom will continue to address this issue, and wants to contribute to a fair and open universal discussion.

What we need is a database in which for any year we could enter all the known, larger cases so that at the end of the year we not only have a useable estimate, but rather a situation where given the list everyone can investigate the estimate's resilience.

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<sup>10</sup> World Health Organisation. The Global Burden of Disease. Geneva: WHO, 2008. p. 74, see [http://www.who.int/topics/global\\_burden\\_of\\_disease/en/](http://www.who.int/topics/global_burden_of_disease/en/). Comp. the information of 171,000 for 2002 in the map among the atlas collection representing the actual world: [http://www.worldmapper.org/display\\_extra.php?selected=484](http://www.worldmapper.org/display_extra.php?selected=484).