



International Journal for Religious Freedom (IJRF)

Journal of the International Institute for Religious Freedom

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

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International Journal for Religious Freedom

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Note to librarians

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

Cover art

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

This is part of a coherent set of pictures illustrating 62 scenes of the New Testament. Reproduction with kind permission by the association Vie de Jesus Mafa (Life of Jesus Mafa). All rights reserved. Vie de Jésus MAFA, 24 rue du Maréchal Joffre, 78000 Versailles, France, www.jesusmafa.com.

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Editorial

It gives the editors of the International Journal for Religious Freedom (*IJRF*) great pleasure to present our readers with the second issue of this interdisciplinary and scholarly publication. We hope that you will find the articles informative, thought-provoking, and of a high standard, and that the journal will equally serve religious freedom. For that purpose we have added some new rubrics.

Contributions in this issue

The newly created rubric *We introduce ...* is designed to draw attention to the work of organisations working in the field of religious freedom. We start off with the *Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP)*, an umbrella body of religious liberty organisations.

Researcher Elizabeth Kendal then gives her opinion and analysis on the efforts of the Organisation of Islamic Conference to redefine religious freedom, which seeks to make defamation of religion a punishable offence by revising important foundational documents of the United Nations.

Our section of *Academic Articles* opens with a contribution by Paul A Marshall, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute's Centre for Religious Freedom. He analyses the range of religious freedom in different parts of the world, with special reference to the regions' dominant religion. Brian J Grim, a Senior Research Fellow at the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, demonstrates a positive correlation between religious freedom and the social well-being of any given country or region. The second instalment of the series on a biblical theology of persecution and discipleship, by Glenn M Penner, explains the implications for martyrdom and suffering that emanate from the purposeful view of history as portrayed in the Old Testament historical books. Charles L Tieszen discusses five commonly held misconceptions about religious persecution.

The rubric *Research in Progress* needed to be postponed to the next issue. We would like to invite researchers from Masters degrees upwards to inform the readers on relevant projects they are currently pursuing.

In order to keep our readership updated on major events concerning religious freedom taking place around the globe, we have created the section *Event Reports*. One of our editors, Christof Sauer, reports on the tension between advocacy on the one hand, and readiness to suffer on the other, in the deliberations of the 2009 World Evangelical Alliance General Assembly and its Mission Commission Consultation in Pattaya, Thailand. The *Resolution on religious freedom* taken by the WEA General Assembly, reproduced in the journal thereafter, was largely penned by members of the WEA Religious Liberty Commission and the IIRF. Also emanating from Pattaya is the

interview with Johan Candelin, the outgoing Executive Director of the WEA Religious Liberty Commission, on some of the high and low points of his twelve years in office.

Under our rubric *Case Studies*, you will find a brief historical overview by Behnan Konutgan, a Christian leader from Turkey, of the history of Christianity in his home region and a moving account of his personal struggles and that of some of his fellow believers, as second class citizens in a largely Muslim country. The second case study by Thomas Schirmmacher explores the legal situation and actual problems of non-Shiite Muslims and non-Muslims in Iran.

The two pieces of *Documentation* both deal with Iran. This was not planned by the editors, we simply happened to receive these submissions. The World Evangelical Alliance records its deep concern about the intended codification of an automatic death penalty for male ‘apostates’ from Islam. Thomas Zimmermans, a German lawyer, using Iran as a case study, presents the very real challenges faced by countries that receive refugees, in trying to interpret the actual human rights and religious freedom situation in their country of origin.

The *Noteworthy* section with a host of topical information on religious freedom issues – among others about an award received by one of our editors, Prof Dr Thomas Schirmmacher – has for the first time been compiled by Dr Byeong Hei Jun. We welcome our new South-Korean colleague!

We are pleased to further include, for the first time, some *Book Reviews*, and last but not least please turn to our *Readers’ Response* section to obtain an impression on how our first issue was received. We invite you similarly to make your opinion and your suggestions known to us, as we continually strive to improve this journal.

We thank Hilfsaktion Märtyrerkirche in Germany (Voice of the Martyrs) for their generous sponsorship of the printing of this issue, and the reprinting of the pilot issue. Find the order form in the back, as well as advertisement for the new WEA Global Issues Series, published in conjunction with the International Institute for Religious Freedom.

Yours for religious freedom

Dr Mirjam Scarborough (executive editor)
on behalf of the editors Prof Dr mult Thomas Schirmmacher
and Dr Christof Sauer

P.S.: The editors would like to congratulate Mirjam Scarborough on the completion of her doctorate in between the editing of the first two issues of IJRF and on her Ph.D. in religious studies received from the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

We Introduce ...

This rubric provides a platform for organisations working in the area of religious liberty to introduce themselves. In this way the editors seek to raise among our readership awareness of and appreciation for the various players in the field, in the hope so to ultimately serve the persecuted church.

Religious Liberty Partnership

It gives the editors great pleasure to open this section of our journal by introducing the Religious Liberty Partnership (*RLP*), an umbrella body whose purpose it is, ‘to encourage and nurture partnering and collaboration among Christian organisations focused on religious liberty.’ More specifically they endeavour to ‘work together in addressing advocacy and in raising the awareness of religious persecution globally.’ They work according to the following principles:¹

Member Guidelines

1. Members of the Religious Liberty Partnership (*RLP*) are primarily involved with ministry to persecuted Christians and/or with religious liberty issues in whatever context and strategy.
2. Members of the *RLP* represent organisations which are globally, regionally, country or project focused in their efforts.
3. Members of the *RLP* agree to the statement of faith in the Lausanne Covenant (<http://www.lausanne.org/>)
4. Members of the *RLP* agree to abide by the Code of Best Practices drafted by the Religious Liberty Partnership and the Wesley Guidelines (below).

Best Practices for Ministry to and with the Persecuted Church²

Introduction

The Code of Best Practices for ministry to and with the persecuted church around the world is designed as a benchmark document to guide the policies and practice of organisations in their involvement. It

¹ This is an edited version of the Membership Guidelines and the Best Practices Document provided by the RLC in Dec. 2008.

² *RLP* views these *Best Practices* as a “living document,” originally drafted by a task force from the Religious Liberty Partnership in August 2007. This is the fourth incarnation, dated March 2008. Questions, comments and more information requests should be sent to: Brian O’Connell, *RLP* Facilitator, Brian@REACTServices.com, Phone: +1-425-218-4718.

is not intended to establish legal standards or liability. Rather the motivation for the development of this code is based upon the responsibility toward all participants and partners in religious liberty work, so that they are served with the highest standards possible.

The code does not necessarily reflect current practice, but encourages aspirations toward excellence. However, minimal standards are implied and therefore these principles should be seen as steps in the process rather than an end in themselves. It is also recognised that the code may not be applicable to all situations in religious liberty ministry.

Principle 1: Collaboration and Partnership

The persecuted church is best served by ministries cooperating and working together while maintaining their ministry distinctives. This to include the reduction of duplication; wisely sharing communication; growing common understanding of problems and root causes of persecution; growing relationship and trust; and accountability (information, money, etc).

Key Indicators

- We are making the time to develop relationship and trust with one another.
- We are actively seeking to avoid duplication of ministry in a given area whenever possible.
- We are seeking to develop our collective intellectual capital by appropriately sharing information, knowledge and lessons learned.
- We are seeing attitudes of competition being reduced.
- We are speaking well of each other.
- We are seeing more joint projects launched.
- We are learning how to share success with each other.

Principle 2: Doing No Harm

Ministry to the persecuted church should operate under the core value of ensuring that we actively work to never do harm to those we are trying to serve. This to include cross-cultural consideration and appreciation; equal access to opportunity; support of local leaders; long-term thinking; and examination of possible exploitation.

Key Indicators

- We are respecting local culture, language and practices.

- We are learning when to take no for an answer in avoiding the exploitation/over exposure of persecuted believers for the sake of publicity/promotion.
- We are promoting unity and not feeding disunity among local Christians by providing broad access to resources, consulting on possible projects, and evaluating past and present projects.

Principle 3: Education and Training

As learning entities we are continually trying to learn from our mistakes, as well as the mistakes of other ministries, and willingly embrace the opportunity to do so in order to serve the persecuted church more effectively. This is to include preparation for future possible persecution; training in Biblical principles and theology; providing orientation and teaching to workers in order to counter dependency; and promotion of local church leadership.

Key Indicators

- We are providing orientation and training on key issues such as dependency, partnering, cultural sensitivity, etc, to our staff and workers.
- We are promoting the understanding and awareness of different levels of persecution.
- We are providing appropriate preparation to our leadership, staff and partners as to the Biblical and missiological principles of persecution.

Principle 4: Communication

Striving to demonstrate integrity in all of our communications. This is to include integrity in promotions; integrity in information gathering; integrity in dissemination; and integrity in the use of statistics.

Key Indicators

- Organisations are providing effective communication without exaggerating the needs, the statistics, and the plight of persecuted Christians.
- Accurate and verifiable statistics and research are being used.
- Appropriate sourcing and obtaining of permissions are being practiced.
- Sensitivity is being shown to the impact on persecuted believers in our information gathering.
- We are following the directives and guidance of a variety of local leaders in what can be reported and publicized.

- We seek agreement on the numbers of those being persecuted and the numbers of martyrs.

Principle 5: Accountability

Mutual accountability leads to more effective ministry and faithful stewardship of our shared calling to the persecuted. This is to include financial standards; information; and evaluation.

Key Indicators

- Adherence to nationally agreed upon financial standards, including certified audited accounting.
- Organisations are open to receiving input from other RLP members as to our faithfulness to and our fulfillment of the best practices.
- Significant concerns on accountability are being expressed face to face.
- Where there is failure to resolve disputes, they are handled by Mathew 18 principles and possible mediation.

Principle 6: Advocacy

Raising the awareness of the situation of persecuted believers as well as seeking to influence socio-economic and political policies and structures. This is to include: advocacy being done with the benefit of persecuted believers in mind; and advocacy being done collaboratively.

Key Indicators

- Neglected peoples are receiving appropriate attention.
- Whenever possible, advocacy is being done cooperatively with other ministries.
- Campaigns and public advocacy are being done with the participation and agreement of the families of those involved and the local church leadership whenever possible.

Principle 7: Operational Strategies

Ministry to the persecuted church must go beyond “marketable” strategies. This to include attitudes of participating with persecuted church leaders and understanding that there may be differences in opinion among local believers on how to handle a given situation.

Key Indicators

- We try and see that our work is never only donor driven.
- Money, technology, resources are not being seen as the only “answer”. When looking to address the needs of the persecuted

we are looking beyond monetary, technical or other material resources.

- Organisations are growing in their heart motivation for the persecuted, not merely by secular management standards.
- Organisations are looking to determine long term considerations and impact as part of their overall strategy rather than mere expediency.
- The establishment of branch offices is being done with sensitivity to local culture, context and economic realities (salary, personnel) as well as avoided when national organizations are doing the required work.
- Organisational involvement is building the capacity and self sufficiency of national leaders and churches.

Principle 8: Fundraising

Raising funds for ministry to the persecuted church needs to exemplify integrity.

Key Indicators

- Accurate and verifiable statistics, facts, and testimonies are used in fund-raising materials with the avoidance of sensationalistic approaches.
- The needs of the persecuted are presented truthfully and respectfully and in such a way as not to exploit their plight for material gain or further endanger them through publicity.

Wesley Guidelines

1. We will not listen to or even ask about bad things concerning each other.
2. If we do hear anything bad, we will not believe it.
3. As soon as possible, we will tell the other person what we have heard.
4. Until we have done that, we will not say a word about it to any other person.
5. Even after we have done that, we will not mention it to anyone.
6. We will never make an exception to these rules unless our consciences force us to do so.

(John Wesley, Charles Wesley, Thos. Maxfield, J. Downes, et al)

Re-Examining Religious Persecution

Constructing a Theological Framework for Understanding Persecution

Charles L. Tieszen

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

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

Religious Freedom Series

Contributions to the study of religious freedom and persecution of Christians

Edited by Christof Sauer and Thomas Schirmacher

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The OIC and the UN: Islamophobia and ‘defamation of religion’

Elizabeth Kendal*

Editorial comment: The following provides an analysis of the events which led to the adoption of a ‘defamation of religions’ resolution by the U.N. Human Rights Council and to the ‘Outcome Document’ of the Durban Review Conference,¹ both of which took place in April 2009. In the process the U.N. Human Rights Council ignored a mass petition signed by over 180 non-governmental organisations opposing the resolution.² While this opinion piece has been written before the adoption of the resolutions, the background information and analysis it provides, are still valuable.

Abstract

The Universal Human Rights Declaration protects the fundamental rights of human beings, e.g. of individuals. The Organisation of Islam Conference has for years pushed for the United Nations Human Rights Council to change its covenants to protect religions instead of individuals. This can be regarded as an attempt to make defamation of Islam or the incitement of Islamophobia a punishable offence. As earlier efforts along these lines have stalled, the OIC is seeking to legitimise the defamation of religions issue by re-casting it as an issue of incitement to religious discrimination, hatred and violence, which poses a serious threat to public order, national security and human rights.

Key words Organisation of Islam Conference, United Nations, UNHRC, Islamophobia, defamation of religion, Durban II.

Durban I – the UN’s first World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance – which was held in Durban, South Africa, in early September 2001 ended with a walkout over its virulent anti-Semitism. Yet sadly it now seems clear that the Durban Review Conference (or Durban II), which will be held in Geneva in April 2009, is shaping up to be even worse.

* Elizabeth Kendal (*1962), after having been the principal researcher and writer for the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission (WEA RLC), now works as an independent researcher. This material was posted on 14 and 21 November 2008 as the World Evangelical Alliance - Religious Liberty News & Analysis. Available online: http://www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc/rlc_article.htm?id=2203 and http://www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc/rlc_article.htm?id=2226.

¹ www.un.org/durbanreview2009/index.shtml.

² www.becketfund.org/index.php/article/991.html; [www.bucer.org/138.html?&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=1106&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=45&cHash=3de72cdf57](http://www.bucer.org/138.html?&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=1106&tx_ttnews[backPid]=45&cHash=3de72cdf57).

As a prelude to Durban II, a Second Preparatory Session of the 20-state Preparatory Committee – of which Libya has been elected chair with Cuba, Pakistan and Iran as vice-chairs – was held in Geneva from 6 to 17 October 2008. The resulting ‘Draft Outcome Document for the Durban Review Conference 2009’ was available on the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) website (Draft 2008).

It is clear from the draft document, as well as from reports emanating from the subsequent 63rd UN General Assembly meeting held in Geneva during the first week of November, that a central focus of Durban II will be ‘Islamophobia,’ which is being presented as ‘a new form of racism.’

Muslims, the draft declaration asserts, are at dire risk of a racial ‘holocaust’ due to ‘a new form of racism’ – ‘Islamophobia’ – which is incited through ‘defamation of Islam.’

The draft declaration recommends that local, national and international laws and human rights covenants be reviewed and amended as necessary so that “defamation of Islam” is made a criminal offence, losing the protection it has long enjoyed under the ‘pretext’ of ‘freedom of expression, counter terrorism or national security.’ It recommends that legal instruments be established to punish offenders – that is, those who ‘defame’ Islam by associating it with violence, human rights abuses or terrorism.

Anne Bayefsky, a York University professor and human rights lawyer who attended the Second Preparatory Session in Geneva, warns:

This is the new dimension of Durban 2, which in many ways makes it a greater threat than Durban 1. It’s really setting up a war of ideas, that has rough implications, between Islamic states and everybody else □ Durban 1 was called an assault on Israel; a demonisation of Israel as racist and analogous to Apartheid South Africa. But in addition, Durban 2 is an assault on freedom of expression and other essential democratic rights and freedoms. (Libin 2008)

The draft declaration has built on the 17 August 2007 report by Mr Doudou Diene, the then UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, and the OIC’s Observatory of Islamophobia. The OIC is the Organisation of Islamic Conference.³

³ For background see: Elizabeth Kendal, UN Human Rights Council: Watershed

Canada and Israel have already pulled out of Durban II while several other Western states have threatened to boycott – most notably Denmark. As reported by Jette Elbaek Maressa in *Jyllands-Posten* (28 Oct 2008), Danish foreign minister Per Stig Moller told his Arab partners during a round trip to the Middle East that if the Organisation of Islamic Conference did not withdraw its proposal to make criticism of religion equivalent to racism, then Western countries will stay away from Durban II. “If the OIC pushes through this draft resolution, they shall not expect European or Western countries to be present at the table,” he said (Maressa 2008).

The Non-Government Organisation ‘UN Watch’ has released a paper on the Durban II Draft Declaration. Entitled ‘Shattering the Red Lines: The Durban II Draft Declaration,’ it examines a “small selection of the 646 provisions of the Durban II draft declaration, highlighting several that breach the EU’s red lines (I.e. the lines the EU determined should not be crossed).

In its opening summary, UN Watch charges that the draft declaration seeks “to distort human rights laws for the purposes of Islamic censorship” by “inserting a prohibition against ‘defamation of religion’ designed to restrict free speech and impose the censorship of Islamic anti-blasphemy laws.”

UN Watch’s paper provides a clear, thorough and yet concise overview and analysis of the most contentious elements of the Durban II draft declaration. It is recommended reading (UN Watch 2008).

days, WEA RLC News & Analysis, 18 Sept 2007. Available online: <http://www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc/reports/articles.htm?id=1411>.

This posting gives a thorough critique of Doudou Diene’s August 2007 report and considers its implications in terms of the Islamisation of international human rights. Also see: Elizabeth Kendal, OIC: Eliminating ‘defamation’ of Islam. WEA RLC News & Analysis, 25 March 2008. Available online: <http://www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc/reports/articles.htm?id=1725>. This posting analyses the OIC’s Observatory of Islamophobia which was launched at the OIC Dakar Summit in March 2008. The Observatory of Islamophobia, which is built on Doudou Diene’s August 2007 report to the UNHRC, must be seen in the context of the OIC’s ‘Ten Year Program of Action’ through which it aims to address the most “prominent challenges facing the Muslim world today”. This posting also presents scenarios and means through which the OIC might fulfil its goal of establishing international instruments to punish – under the pretext of peace and human rights – those whom they charge with inciting Islamophobia through ‘defamation’ of Islam.

63rd UN General Assembly

Reliefweb has published a report on the 63rd General Assembly that was held in Geneva subsequent to the Durban Review Conference Second Preparatory Session (UN General Assembly 2008).

The report describes representatives from Egypt, Sudan, Libya and Pakistan all expressing great concern over the threat posed by this ‘new form of racism’ – Islamophobia – which is incited by ‘defamation of religion.’ According to the Libyan representative, freedom of speech is not the issue – at issue is the ‘misuse’ of that right.

The representative from Iran told the assembly that modern-day racism is no longer based on supposed inequality between races, but is based on culture, nationality or religion. He claimed that xenophobic acts against migrants, refugees and asylum seekers; defamation of religions; religious intolerance and racial profiling are all expressions of this new form of racism which seeks legitimacy and protection under various pretexts such as combating terrorism.

According to the representative from Saudi Arabia, Islam rejects all forms of discrimination and so in Saudi Arabia there are legal provisions to protect all the rights of all persons regardless of race, religion, status or gender.

Various free, multi-racial Western democracies (a minority in the UN) denounced racism while making strong and clear defences of human rights including religious liberty and freedom of expression.

The representative from France (speaking on behalf of the European Union [EU]) reminded the assembly that the EU had supported the organisation of a Review Conference as long as certain conditions were met and certain lines not crossed. He said that the primary goal should be the full implementation of existing normative framework and that new norms should only be drawn up if they were deemed necessary, were subject to a broad consensus and did not go back on universal achievements by restricting the current scope of human rights.

He expressed the European Union’s concern that the ‘thought process’ on the possible creation of complementary norms was moving in a direction that could reduce the level of human rights

promotion and protection. According to Reliefweb, the representative from France said the EU would "not allow the United Nations principles to be undermined" and would work in accordance with the principles that had been set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He said the Review Conference should concentrate on the implementation of the existing framework without restricting any human rights, establishing any hierarchy among victims, or excluding any one group. As well, the review conference should show how promoting human rights, especially the freedom of speech, could play an important role in fighting racism.

The representative from the USA expressed concern at the trend of conflating issues of racism and religion which he said were two distinct issues. He likewise asserted that the cure for intolerance is more dialogue, not less.

The representative from Israel regretted that alliances had trumped ideals and warned that nations with a genuine desire to promote peace should guard against the co-opting of legitimate language and ideas by racist demagogues. He expressed concern that Durban II risked becoming itself a platform of racial incitement, and he feared that words might quickly turn to actions.

The OIC formulated its Ten Year Program of Action (TYPOA) in Makkah in December 2005. Item VI on the TYPOA is 'Combating Islamophobia.' The OIC determined to do this by means of: 1) establishing an Observatory on Islamophobia tasked with monitoring Islamophobia and 'defamation' of Islam and issuing annual reports; 2) getting the UN to adopt an international resolution on Islamophobia, and call on all States to enact laws to counter it; and 3) establishing international legal instruments to enforce anti-defamation laws and deliver deterrent punishments to those charged with inciting Islamophobia through defamation of Islam.

The Observatory of Islamophobia was launched in Dakar in March 2008 and the UN has been passing resolutions against Islamophobia and 'defamation' of religion ever since the OIC and Arab League-incited Cartoon Intifada of February 2006. All that is left on the OIC's agenda for combating Islamophobia is the legitimisation and implementation of national and international laws and legal instruments to punish offenders. It looks like Durban II might be a step in this direction.

Recasting defamation of religions as incitement: Resources and analysis

In June 2008, at the invitation of the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), the European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) submitted an analysis of the concept of ‘Defamation of Religions’ as it is being introduced by the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and General Assembly.

The paper is available on-line and is essential reading for anyone seeking a clearer understanding of the implications of the resolution ‘Combating Defamation of Religions’ (ECLJ 2008).

Another excellent analysis comes from the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty. They have issued an ‘Issues Brief’ on ‘Defamation of Religions,’ the updated 27 May 2008 condensed version of which can be found online (Becket Fund 2008).

The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty regards the defamation of religions concept as “fundamentally inconsistent with the principles outlined in the United Nation’s founding and legal documents’ as ‘it violates the very foundations of the human rights tradition by protecting ideas rather than the individuals who hold ideas.”

The Becket Fund notes that anti-defamation measures would “force the state to determine which religious viewpoints may be expressed.”

“‘Defamation of religions’ measures ... are used to protect a set of beliefs, ideas, and philosophies. Yet religions make conflicting truth claims and indeed the diversity of truth claims is exactly what religious freedom as a concept is designed to protect.” It adds: “There is no basis in international or regulatory law for the concept of protection of religious ideas.”

The ECLJ position is clear from its opening paragraphs: “The position of the ECLJ in regards to the issue of ‘defamation of religion’ resolutions, as they have been introduced at the UN Human Rights Council and General Assembly, is that they are in direct violation of international law concerning the rights to freedom of religion and expression. The ‘defamation of religion’ resolutions establish as the primary focus and concern the protection of ideas and religions

generally, rather than protecting the rights of individuals to practise their religion, which is the chief purpose of international religious freedom law ...”

‘Sword and shield’

Because the resolutions on combating defamation of religions are sponsored by the OIC, the ECLJ examines freedom of religion and freedom of expression in OIC states to properly understand the OIC’s philosophy regarding this concept they are advancing. The ECLJ concludes: “The clever thrust of the OIC position uses the concepts of ‘defamation of religion’ and blasphemy as both sword and shield.” In the West it is used as a sword against the media, academics and all critics of Islam, while in Muslim countries “blasphemy laws are used as a shield to protect the dominant religion (Islam) ... silence minority religious believers and prevent Muslims from converting to other faiths, which is still a capital crime in many Muslim countries.”

The ECLJ recommended that the OHCHR and the UN uphold Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR 1948) and Articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR 1966). (Those articles are copied at the end for your convenience).

Focus shifting from ‘defamation’ to incitement

Concerning the right to freedom of expression – which is outlined in ICCPR Article 19 – ICCPR Article 20 part 2 makes the following provision: “Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.”

The ECLJ notes that Article 20 of ICCPR is “at the heart of the debate involving the legal justification of the ‘defamation of religions’ resolutions.” The ECLJ quotes UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Asma Jahangir: “The threshold of the acts that are referred to in article 20 is relatively high because they have to constitute advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred. Accordingly, the Special Rapporteur is of the opinion that expressions should only be prohibited under article 20 if they constitute incitement

to imminent acts of violence or discrimination against a specific individual or group.”

This is exactly what the OIC is addressing as it seeks now to shift the focus from ‘defamation of religions’ to ‘incitement’ of dangerous Islamophobia.

Consider these words from Mr Githu Muigai’s first address to the UN General Assembly as Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (3 November 2008, Geneva):

In the ninth session of the Human Rights Council, I presented my predecessor’s [Mr Doudou Diene’s] report on ‘Combating Defamation of Religion’. The report highlights key issues, including reflecting the state of some forms of religious discrimination including Islamophobia, Anti-Semitism and Christianophobia. The report also makes a central recommendation to Member States, particularly in the context of the Durban Review Process: to move from the concept of ‘defamation of religions’ to the notion of ‘incitement to racial and religious hatred’. In this regard, I was glad to be informed that there seems to be an emerging trend among most Member States in agreeing to this idea, which would help ground the debate on concrete human rights principles and norms. (Muigai 2008)

If the OIC can re-shape the ‘defamation of religions’ issue into one of ‘incitement’ and ‘public order’ – don’t forget, they have already succeeded in making it a human rights issue by re-moulding it as an issue of racism – then those who seek provisions to protect freedom of expression through Articles 19 and 20 of the ICCPR will find that they no longer have a case. In fact, if ‘defamation of religions’ is made an issue of incitement to religious hatred, violence or ‘holocaust,’ then according to Article of ICCPR that incitement/defamation should be prohibited by law.

Conflict as a result of ‘pre-occupation with difference’
Meanwhile, yet another interfaith or inter-cultural initiative has come and gone. The Saudi-sponsored, UN-run ‘Culture of Peace’ conference – a follow-up from the Saudi-sponsored Madrid conference – was held in the UN Headquarters in New York 12-13 November.

The President of the UN General Assembly, Miguel d’Escoto Brockmann (a Nicaraguan Catholic priest and foreign minister under

Daniel Ortega) opened the peace conference with these provocative words:

Our world is experiencing an extremely difficult period, the worst since the founding of the United Nations. It is a time of numerous bankruptcies, but the worst is the moral bankruptcy of humankind's self-proclaimed 'more advanced societies', which has spread throughout the world. (Xinhua 2008)

Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah lamented that throughout history conflicts have resulted from mankind's pre-occupation with differences. While King Abdullah's analysis of history is debatable his implication is clear: if we want to live in peace we should refrain from being pre-occupied with our differences (Xinhua 2008; King Abdullah 2008).

Felice Gaer, chairwoman of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom commented that she'd have liked to see the conference held in Saudi Arabia. "The fact that it isn't speaks volumes," she said adding that Saudi Arabia's entrenched and systematic religious discrimination would make the conditions of entrance into the country intolerable for non-Muslim religious leaders.

Reporting on the Saudi-sponsored 'Culture of Peace' conference for Fox News, Jennifer Lawinski writes:

Commission chairwoman Gaer thinks it's more than a public relations move for the Saudi government, it's a cooperative effort between Muslim nations to reinforce the defamation of religion resolution they're sponsoring before the General Assembly this fall.

The resolution, introduced by Pakistan to the UN Human Rights Council in 1999 has been taken up by the General Assembly and passed every year since 2005.

The non-binding Resolution 62/145 adopted in 2007 says it 'notes with deep concern the intensification of the campaign of defamation of religions and the ethnic and religious profiling of Muslim minorities in the aftermath of 11 September 2001.'

It 'stresses the need to effectively combat defamation of all religions and incitement to religious hatred, against Islam and Muslims in particular.'

Gaer said the Saudi-sponsored inter-faith meeting in Madrid, like the UN resolution, was part of an attempt to legitimise sharia law by making attendees sign a declaration that said the participants would

encourage ‘respecting heavenly religions, preserving their high status, condemning any insult to their symbols.’

‘This was a Madrid declaration calling for or affirming the idea of the global blasphemy law in slightly moderated language,’ she said. ‘This would give them the freedom to declare anything from cartoons to incitement to a whole range of things to be defamation.’

Twenty-two members of the Council of the League of Arab States adopted the declaration and asked the UN and UNESCO to do so as well.

The defamation of religions resolution has been criticised for acting as a shield for countries that persecute any insult to Islam and intimidate Western nations that may attempt to criticise them.

‘The problem is that this particular conference will legitimise the Saudis as somehow the leaders [of the anti-religious defamation movement] when they are the promoters of a particularly intolerant form of their own religions practice,’ Gaer said. ‘It will promote this idea of defamation which puts severe restrictions on freedom of expression and turns the whole concept of human rights on its head.’ (Lawinski 2008)

The Culture of Peace conference's unanimously approved resolution “(r)ecognises the commitment of all religions to peace” (Culture of Peace Resolution 2008). The problems caused by some believing that ‘peace’ is achieved through the elimination of dissent and difference, or through enforced submission, conformity or bland uniformity was not addressed. Rather, leaders were repeatedly encouraged to accept the myth that while creeds may vary considerably, faith leads us to common (presumably noble) values.

The reality is however, that our diverse creeds and faiths give rise to diverse, sometimes conflicting values. The question remains: what should be protected – state-proscribed creeds or the fundamental rights of human beings?

The OIC will seek to legitimise the defamation of religions issue by re-casting it (using the language of the ICCPR) as an issue of incitement to religious discrimination, hatred and violence, which poses a serious threat to public order, national security and human rights.

Important Documents

UDHR 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.

ICCPR Article 19

1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.
2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.
3. The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary: (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.

ICCPR Article 20

1. Any propaganda for war shall be prohibited by law.
2. Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.

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The range of religious freedom in 2008: Results of a global survey

Paul A Marshall*

Abstract

Religious freedom and religious persecution affect all religious groups and are not confined to any one area. There are large regional variations. North Africa and Asia generally tend to score poorly. Comparing countries according to religious background, historically Christian countries tend to score best, Buddhist countries either well or poorly, Hindu-majority countries don't score well, and Muslim-majority countries make up the areas with the largest current restrictions on religious freedom. Freedom of religion generally corresponds with civil liberties. The US Department of State reports on religious freedom are found to be exemplary, with some weaknesses and problems, which call for standardised criteria. [CS]

Keywords Religious freedom, global survey, classification, geography, religion, human rights, US Department of State Reports on religious freedom.

Editorial preface

This essay gives an overall analysis of the 101 country and territorial profiles in Marshall's *Religious Freedom in the World* (2008). The survey covers more than 95 percent of the world's population. We quote parts of the preface to the book: "The countries have been selected so that the survey represents each continent, major religion, and geographic area; covers countries with large populations; describes particularly egregious violators of religious freedom; and

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adequately illustrates variations within regions. It should be emphasized that the numbers are ratings of the situation in countries, not of the conduct of governments. In some cases, such as in situations of civil war, there may be little religious freedom, but a government may be able to do little about it.

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

Finally, in line with most human rights treaties, this survey covers freedom of 'religion or belief.' There are beliefs that, functionally, take the place of explicitly religious beliefs, and these, too, should be protected. Atheists and agnostics may also suffer loss of freedom of 'religion or belief' and, in turn, may deny such freedom to others." (Marshall 2008:xiii)

The Spread of Religious Freedom

Religious freedom and religious persecution affect all religious groups. Some – Baha'is in Iran¹, Ahmadis in Pakistan, Buddhists in Tibet, Falun Gong in China, Christians in Saudi Arabia – are now among the most intensely persecuted, but there is no group in the world that does not suffer to some degree because of its beliefs. Atheists and agnostics can also suffer from religious persecution. In Indonesia it is in principle illegal to be an atheist, though this provision is not enforced; but any Saudi Arabian, all of whom must, by law, be Muslim, who pronounced himself an atheist faces a real risk of being executed for apostasy. Religions, whether large, such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism, or small, such as Baha'i, Jehovah's Witness, or Judaism, all suffer to some degree. The most

¹ As the material is a reflection on the survey data itself no further references are given in this article. The respective country profiles can be found in Marshall 2008.

Figure 1: Religious Freedom by Area

Religious Freedom Rating	Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe	North Africa and West Asia	Western Europe and North Atlantic	Asia	Africa	Latin America
1	Estonia Hungary		Ireland United States			
2	Latvia Lithuania Ukraine		Austria Canada Denmark Italy Norway Portugal Spain Sweden	Japan	Botswana Mali Namibia Senegal South Africa	Brazil Chile Ecuador Guatemala
3	Bulgaria Romania	Israel	Belgium France Germany Greece	Mongolia Philippines Thailand	Kenya	Argentina Nicaragua Peru Venezuela
4	Armenia Georgia Kosovo Kyrgyzstan Macedonia Moldova Russia Serbia Slovakia	Jordan Lebanon Morocco Oman		Malaysia	Cameroon Tanzania	Mexico
5	Azerbaijan Kazakhstan Tajikistan	Algeria Kuwait Libya Syria Tunisia Turkey Yemen		India Indonesia Laos Nepal Sri Lanka	Chad Comoros Ethiopia Nigeria Zimbabwe	Columbia
6	Belarus	Afghanistan Bahrain Egypt Pakistan Palestinian Areas		Bangladesh China Vietnam	Mauritania	Cuba
7	Turkmenistan Uzbekistan	Iran Iraq Saudi Arabia		Burma China-Tibet Maldives North Korea	Eritrea Sudan	

egregious persecuting states tend to be either communist, such as North Korea and China, nationalist, such as Burma and Eritrea, or radical Islamist, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia. In many cases, restrictions on religion come from people who are members of the same general religious group but who are part of a different subgroup. Thus non-Orthodox Christians in Russia, Greece, and Armenia suffer discrimination from the Orthodox, while Shiite Muslims in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia suffer persecution and even death at the hands of some of the dominant Sunni groups.

Religious freedom is also not confined to any one area or continent (see Figure 1). There are relatively free countries in every continent. Japan, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Botswana, Mali, Namibia, Senegal, and South Africa score better in this survey than do Belgium, France, Germany, and Greece. Estonia and Hungary are among the freest countries in the world. Most Latin American countries also score well. There are absolutely no grounds for thinking that religious freedom is an exclusively Western concern or achievement.

Some Westerners and Third World tyrants have elevated “economic rights” or purported “Asian” and “Islamic” values as the most important features of rights, and have denigrated or downgraded civil rights, such as religious freedom, as quasi-luxuries that would need to be advanced, if at all, only after more basic needs such as food and shelter have been achieved. Proponents of these views should be asked why several Asian countries, such as Mongolia and Thailand, which have a background of poverty and underdevelopment, and “Asian” traditions at least as strong as China and Vietnam, both value and successfully defend religious freedom, and why desperately poor African countries, including poor Muslim-majority African countries such as Mali and Senegal, can do the same. Religious freedom is desired throughout the world and has been achieved in places on all continents. It is a moral travesty of the highest order to maintain that because people are hungry or cold it is legitimate to repress their beliefs as well.

While high levels of religious freedom occur in many areas throughout the world, there are still large regional variations. The countries of the North Atlantic area covered in this survey all score between one and three, and thus all show a high level of religious

freedom (following the practice of Freedom House, this survey classifies countries with a score of one to three as “free,” four to five as “partly free,” and six to seven as “not free”). The countries of Latin America also score highly, with only Colombia, Mexico, and Cuba scoring worse than three.

The countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union cover a wide spread, from Estonia and Hungary, rated a one, the most free, to Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, rated a seven, the least free. There are countries at each level, with those bordering the Baltic (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) as well as Hungary and Ukraine scoring better. Among Asian countries, the self-professed communist powers (China, China-Tibet, North Korea and Vietnam) comprise much of the most repressive categories.

The areas of North Africa and West Asia tend to score poorly. Israel (excluding the occupied territories) scores a three, and Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Oman, a four. Algeria, Kuwait, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, and Yemen score a five, Afghanistan, Bahrain, Egypt, Pakistan, and the Palestinian area six, and others seven (Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia). These findings, as well as those for other areas, are broadly consistent with other reports’ findings regarding human rights and freedom generally in these countries.

Religious Freedom and Religion

There is similar variation in the religious background of countries with high levels of religious freedom. This is obviously a complex matter, since current regimes may reflect comparatively little of a country’s religious background. China, Tibet, and Vietnam all have a largely Buddhist background, but current religious repression comes at the hand of communist party regimes whose members profess to be atheistic materialists. Turkey has a Muslim background, but its constitutional order is highly secularist, while Muslim-background Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan suffer under repression by Soviet political holdovers (on religious freedom in secular settings, see my essay “Secular and Religious, Church and State” Marshall 2008:12-16). Nevertheless, since the survey usually covers several countries of each religious background, the overall patterns can be revealing (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Religious Freedom by Religious Background

Freedom Rating	Catholic	Protestant	Orthodox	Mixed Christian	Hindu	Religions Related Buddhism and	Islam	Other	Christian Mixed Muslim/
1	Hungary Ireland	Estonia USA							
2	Austria Brazil Chile Ecuador Guatemala Italy Lithuania Portugal Spain	Botswana Denmark Norway South Africa Sweden	Ukraine	Australia Canada Latvia Namibia		Japan	Mali Senegal		
3	Argentina Belgium France Nicaragua Peru Philippines Venezuela	Kenya	Bulgaria Greece Romania	Germany		Mongolia Thailand		Israel	
4	Mexico Slovakia	Tanzania	Armenia Georgia Macedonia Moldova Russia Serbia				Jordan Kosovo Kyrgyzstan Malaysia Morocco Oman		Cameroon Lebanon
5	Columbia	Zimbabwe			India Nepal	Laos Sri Lanka	Algeria Azerbaijan Bahrain Comoros Egypt Indonesia Kazakhstan Kuwait Libya, Syria Tajikistan Tunisia, Turkey Yemen		Chad Ethiopia Nigeria
6	Cuba		Belarus			China Vietnam	Afghanistan Bangladesh Mauritania Pakistan Palestinian Areas		
7						Burma China- Tibet North Korea	Iran Iraq Maldives Saudi Arabia Sudan Turkmenistan Uzbekistan		Eritrea

Historically, Christian countries tend to have the best scores in religious freedom, as they do in political rights and civil liberties. Of the forty-one countries surveyed that can be rated as religiously “free” (i.e., scoring three or above), thirty-five are traditionally Christian. Conversely, only two of the forty-two traditionally Christian countries surveyed (Belarus and Cuba) are “not free” (i.e., scoring six or seven). It should also be noted that these scores reflect not only religious background but also levels of wealth and economic development.

The other religiously “free” countries are Israel and three countries of largely Buddhist background – Japan, Mongolia, and Thailand. The Buddhist countries with poor scores largely reflect the presence of communist regimes in China, Tibet, Laos, North Korea, and Vietnam. If these are excluded, the remaining countries, except Burma, score relatively well. There are few Hindu-majority countries in the world and, of those surveyed, Nepal scores poorly on political rights and civil liberties generally, as well as on religious freedom. India is unusual in that its score for religious freedom, five, is markedly lower than its otherwise good record on democracy and on civil liberties generally. This difference reflects the upsurge within recent years of a militant Hinduism in India, coupled with attacks including large-scale massacres against religious minorities, especially Muslims and Christians, the growth of anti-conversion laws, and an increase in religiously based terrorism tied to Kashmir, which has in turn provoked repressive state measures.

The Muslim majority countries comprise the religious areas with the largest current restrictions on religious freedom. This pattern parallels problems with democracy, civil liberties, and economic freedom, but the negative trend with respect to religious freedom is even stronger. Of the twenty “unfree” countries and territories surveyed, twelve are Muslim majority. Of the seven countries receiving the lowest possible score, four are Muslim majority. This is a phenomenon that goes beyond the Arab world or the Middle East. In measures of, for example, electoral democracy, the Muslim world outside of the greater Middle East scores better than the Middle Eastern countries, and over half of the world’s Muslims live in electoral democracies: the problems with democracy are concentrated in the Middle East. However, in terms of religious freedom, the large Muslim democracies of Indonesia and Bangladesh score a five and a six respectively. In these cases, the problems of religious freedom are

due not to government repression but to widespread societal religious violence, including religiously based terrorism, aimed at minorities and at undercutting the government. It should also be added that there are religiously free Muslim majority countries, including some of the poorest, Mali and Senegal, which are religiously freer than many European countries.

Religious Freedom and Other Human Rights

A comparison of ratings for religious freedom with Freedom House's ratings for political rights and civil liberties allows us to see how the degree of religious freedom in a country correlates with its record of human rights in general and vice versa (Marshall 2008:486-489). In eighty-seven out of the hundred and one countries covered, the score for religious freedom is identical to or within one point of the score for civil liberties in general. Consequently, freedom of religion generally correlates with civil liberties.

To some degree this trend reflects methodology, since the criteria for religious freedom in this survey and the criteria for civil liberties overlap considerably. However, this overlap is not simply a methodological artifact but rather reflects the simple reality that religious freedom is necessarily a component of civil rights in general. In practical terms, this means that restrictions on the press necessarily involve restrictions on the religious press, that restrictions on freedom of association necessarily imply restrictions on religious association, that restrictions on speech necessarily imply restriction on religious speech. Consequently, it is only to be expected that freedom of religion and other freedoms will usually go together. Religion exists not (only) in a transcendent realm but is a fundamental and integral part of all human freedom.

Given the fact that these various dimensions of human freedom usually go together, it can be useful to consider situations where differences between scores for religious freedom and for human rights in general are systematic, though small. In general these differences are idiosyncratic, but one trend emerges in Europe. Of the eleven western European countries surveyed, ten had lower scores for religious freedom than they did for civil liberties in general, and one, Ireland, had the same score. None had higher scores for religious freedom.

The differences should not be exaggerated: all these countries still score well in religious freedom and rank among the freest countries in the world. Nevertheless, there is a pattern. Many of these countries have both a history and a current practice wherein their reaction to religious nonconformity is more repressive than their response to nonconformity in general (on this matter, see Willy Fautre's essay "European Trends" in Marshall 2008:28-32). These trends reflect a combination of an attachment to and discrimination in favor of a traditionally dominant religion or religions, and a secularist mindset that produces an antipathy toward, and sometimes fear of, new, unorthodox religions, which are often castigated as "sects." To this problem may be added the growth of violence by extremist Muslim groups combined with state restrictions on Islamic expression, such as head coverings. Despite these countries' continuing openness, much of Europe seems to be becoming less religiously free.

U.S. State Department Reports on Religious Freedom

In September 1999, as required by law under the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, the U. S. State Department released its first annual Report on religious freedom worldwide. The Reports are impressive pieces of work and, by and large, give detailed and comprehensive overviews of the state of religious freedom in each country. However, the compilation of this current survey allows us to point out some weaknesses in the State Department's work.

First, the fact that the Report's material is simply an ordered compilation of information about each country, and is not comparative, makes it difficult to compare one country to another. This has the effect of blurring distinctions so that many countries appear to be equally repressive. The very breadth of the material tends to obscure important differences. Indeed, in the 2006 report, released September 15, 2006, there is an unjustifiably longer discussion on the restriction of Scientologists in Germany than there is on the restriction of Bahai's in Iran, the restrictions of all non-Muslims in Saudi Arabia, and the restrictions on all religious groups in Zimbabwe.

In other instances the Report downplays the severity or significance of restrictions on religious freedom, perhaps in deference to the governments concerned. For example, the 2007 State

Department report on religious freedom in Egypt has its strengths and is stronger than the reports published before 2005: unlike these earlier documents, it does not say the situation is improving. In keeping with the 2005 report, it no longer claims, as it had in earlier reports, that the “practice of Christianity or Judaism does not conflict with Shari’a (Islamic law),” nor does it make the weaker claim, used in 2004, that “the Government does not consider the practice of Christianity or Judaism to conflict with Shari’a.” Instead it simply says that “religious practices that conflict with the Government’s interpretation of Shari’a are prohibited” and gives no opinion as to whether this interpretation conflicts with Christianity and Judaism. This change suggests that the State Department may accept that there are such conflicts.

However, the report continues to suffer from defects, particularly concerning its use of excessively mild and, in some cases, misleading language. It says that “members of the non-Muslim minority generally worship without harassment...,” which underplays the fact that freedom of worship is only one component of religious freedom. It is also unclear what “generally” means – it might only mean that most worship services do not suffer harassment most of the time, which would be a very weak claim. It says that “there were occasional reports that police harassed converts from Islam to Christianity.” “Harassment” is much too weak a word to describe the fact that such converts have been arrested, imprisoned, interrogated, and tortured, and that in November 2003, one such convert died in police custody. Converts also fear attack and even murder by Muslim radicals. The report itself gives the example (omitted in the 2005 report) of Baha al-Aqqad, a recent convert to Christianity from Islam, who on April 6, 2005, was arrested on the grounds that he had ‘defamed Islam’ and held in Doqqi prison. He was transferred to various prisons and detained until April 2007. “Harassment” is an inadequate term to describe torture, or a two-year detention without trial or charges.

Another example of misleading language involves references to “sectarian clashes.” The Report describes as “sectarian clashes” the incidents that took place in January 2006 in Udayssat, near Luxor. Its description also says that “On January 18 several hundred Muslim residents of the area surrounded the building, vandalized the property, and attempted to set it ablaze. In the ensuing melee, approximately a dozen persons, both Christian and Muslim, were injured, along with several policemen. On January 20 assailants killed a forty-seven-year-

old Christian farmer, Kamal Shaker Megalaa, as he returned from his fields. The Luxor district attorney ordered the arrest and investigation of several Muslims from Udayssat on suspicion of involvement in his murder.” This is a description of attacks on Copts, not of a “sectarian clash.”

In describing attacks on three churches in Alexandria in April 2006, it says “Mahmud Salaheddin Abdul Razzak, a Muslim man, carried out sequential knife attacks at three Alexandria churches, which resulted in the death of seventy-eight-year-old Noshi Atta Guirgis and injuries to more than a dozen other Christians. The police quickly arrested the twenty-five-year-old Razzak, who had a history of mental illness, and charged him in the murder and assaults.” It is not clear why the reports say that the man was arrested “quickly” since, if he was the perpetrator, he managed to attack a dozen people in three places, one of which was nine miles from the others. The State Department also seems to have accepted the Egyptian government contention that there was only one attacker, whereas other reports refer to several attackers and suggest that one person could not have conducted nearly contemporaneous attacks in three varied locations. In addition, the Department appears to accept the Egyptian government’s claim that the perpetrator was mentally ill, without alluding to the fact that, as a means of minimizing their importance, that government frequently describes religious attacks as having been carried out by mentally ill people. This claim has been made so often that Egyptians frequently make a joke about it: we are a country of mentally ill people.

Perhaps most importantly, the State Department reports sometimes display a truncated view of religion (see also Thomas F Farr's essay “Religious Freedom and national security” in Marshall 2008:17-22 which describes a consistent tendency to underestimate the importance of religion). At times it contrasts politics, nationalism, and ethnicity with religion, as though concrete acts, events, and movements were necessarily of only one or another category. In fact, most things human are several of these things at once. A war can be both economic and religious; a conflict can be both political and religious, just as a wall can be both thick and tall. Cultures are usually religious, and religions are usually cultural (see Marshall 2008:441-444 “The nature of religious freedom”).

This is not a mere definitional quibble of interest only to academics: it is central to the proper implementation of the entire 1998 International Religious Freedom Act. The focus of the Act is not human rights violations against “religious” people. After all, since most people in the world claim some form of religious identity, then most human rights violations of any kind are against religious believers. The Act is instead concerned not with all forms of restrictions or persecution of religious people, but with persecution with a focus on the grounds that are themselves in part religious – where a person’s or community’s religion is a component of the persecution or discrimination they suffer. Hence a truncated view of religion would lead to a truncated implementation of the act.

Despite these critical comments, it must be re-emphasised that the State Department reports are generally exemplary pieces of work and the Reports on religious freedom marks a milestone in reporting on religious freedom. These problems do highlight, however, the need for standardized criteria.

Conclusions

It is clear from the country profiles in religious freedom in the world, as well as from State Department reports and other surveys, that violations of religious freedom worldwide are massive, widespread, and, in many parts of the world, intensifying. This leads to three other conclusions; first, that attention to and action on religious freedom have been comparatively weak. Second, that the important role of religion in conflicts and in political orders has been comparatively neglected. Third, that both of these situations are now beginning to change, a change that we hope this present survey will accelerate.

Religious freedom and social well-being: A critical appraisal

Brian J Grim*

Abstract

Based on extensive research the author demonstrates that social and governmental religious freedom as part of an overall 'bundled commodity of human freedoms' contributes significantly to the social well-being of a country's citizens. This because religious freedom positively impacts on stability, democracy, as well as religious tolerance within a society.

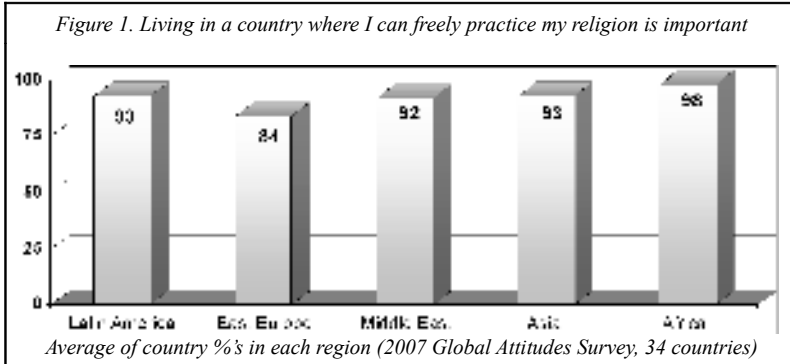
Keywords Social and governmental religious freedom, social well-being, 'bundled commodity' of human freedoms, equitable framework.[MS]

To judge from international survey data, people the world over want to be able to practice their religion freely. In the 2007 Pew Global Attitudes Survey, publics in 34 countries covering five different regions were asked about the importance of practicing their religion freely.¹ The response was extremely high, ranging from 84 percent in

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¹ See "World Publics Welcome Global Trade—But Not Immigration," Pew Global Attitudes Project, October 4, 2007, <http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/258topline.pdf>. Question wording: "How important is it to you to live in a country where you can practice your religion freely? Is it very important, somewhat important, not too important or not at all important?" Countries covered: The Americas: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela; Eastern Europe: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Ukraine; Middle East: Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestinian territories, Turkey; Asia: Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan; Africa: Ethiopia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda. The question was not asked in Western Europe.

Eastern Europe to 98 percent in Africa. On average across the 34 countries, 93 percent indicated that it is important to be able to live in a country where they can practice their religion freely, with less than 2 percent indicating that it wasn't important at all.



Yet at the same time, religion is implicated in many of today's most urgent security problems. Millions have been killed or displaced due to religion-related conflicts in the first years of the 21st century alone.² Such conflicts lead to political instability, prevent the consolidation of democracy, and feed terrorism.

This raises a critical question: While the global public may want religious freedom, is it risky to give it to them?³ Or alternatively, could religious freedom in fact be an essential part of the solution to socio-political problems? In what follows, I explore the global relationship between religious freedom and social well-being (or lack thereof), drawing from extensive international data on religious freedom and various social and political indicators.

² Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke, "International Religion Indexes: Government Regulation, Government Favoritism, and Social Regulation of Religion," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* (2006). See data on religious abuse and displacement coded from the State Department International Religious Freedom reports at www.TheADRA.com.

³ See Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke, "Religious Persecution in Cross-National Context: Clashing Civilizations or Regulated Religious Economies?" *American Sociological Review* 72:4 (2007): 633-658; and Brian J. Grim (2008). "God's Economy: Religious Freedom and Socio-Economic Well-being," in Paul Marshall, ed., *Religious Freedom in the World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 42-47.

Is religious freedom correlated with socio-economic well-being?

At an anecdotal level, my own international observations while living abroad lead me to hypothesize that religious freedom should correlate strongly with positive social indicators. For example, I have lived in both the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. In the Emirates, where my Catholic faith was legal, I had many ways to contribute to society, both through the church as well as through other avenues. I felt motivated to work hard and contribute to society. In Saudi Arabia, however, where my Catholic faith was illegal, I had much less enthusiasm for work and no real desire to contribute to society outside of work. If my feelings were representative, it could be part of the explanation for the fact that the per capita income in the Emirates is \$55,200, while in Saudi Arabia it is only \$20,700.⁴

Are there multinational statistical data that confirm these impressions? According to a recent study of 101 countries conducted by the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom, the answer is yes. The presence of religious freedom in a country mathematically correlates with the presence of other fundamental, responsible freedoms⁵ (including civil and political liberty, press freedom, and economic freedom) and with the longevity of democracy.⁶

Harvard Economist and Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen⁷ argues, however, that human freedom is not just the *general* opportunity

⁴ CIA Factbook estimates.

⁵ "Responsible" freedom means that freedoms should be used responsibly for the good of people; otherwise, anarchy and exploitation of the weak can result. Specifically, religious freedom does not give license to cause harm or exploit others.

⁶ Correlations between the Hudson Institute's Religious Freedom Score and the other measures reported by Grim (2008) are all statistically significant at $p < .001$, two-tailed, and are as follows: Freedom House civil liberty index (.862); Freedom House political liberty index (.822); Reporters Without Borders press freedom index (.804); Heritage Foundation economic freedom index (.743); and the longevity of democracy index (.646).

⁷ See Amartya K. Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Knopf., 1999) and Amartya K. Sen, *Rationality and Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2002).

for such freedoms, but also the *specific* processes within a country that result in better lives. Thus, if religious freedom is an integral part of the “bundled commodity” of human freedoms, religious freedom should be closely associated with the general betterment of people’s lives. The Hudson Institute data again confirm just such a correlation. The study found that wherever religious freedom is high, there tends to be fewer incidents of armed conflict, better health outcomes, higher levels of earned income, and better educational opportunities for women. Moreover, religious freedom is associated with higher overall human development, as measured by the human development index.⁸

Figure 2. Fundamental, Responsible Human Freedoms – A Bundled Commodity



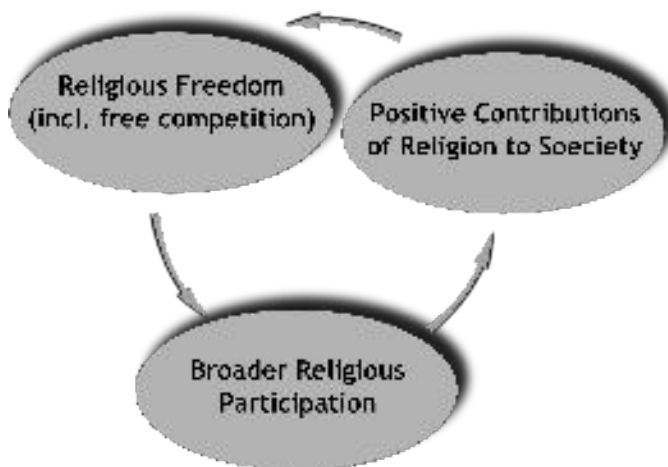
Statistically significant correlations found in the 2007 Hudson Institute study⁹ (101 countries)

⁸ Correlations between the Hudson Institute’s Religious Freedom Score and the other measures reported by Grim (2008) had the correlation signs reversed in this analysis to reflect correlation with religious freedom rather than restricted freedom; the correlations are statistically significant at $p < .05$, two-tailed (or better), and are as follows: Military Expenditure as a percentage of GDP in 2005 (– .3); Armed Conflict since 1988 (– .3); Seats in parliament held by women (.3); percentage of females reenrolled in tertiary schools, 2002/2003 (.6); female earned income (.6); male earned income (.5); gross domestic product (.3); human development index (.5); physicians per 100,000 people (.3); infant deaths per 1,000 (– .4); underweight children (– .3).

Does religious freedom lead to socio-economic well-being?

Religious freedom, then, is *associated* with better social outcomes, but can we say there is a causal relationship? More advanced statistical tests suggest that there is indeed a critical independent contribution that religious freedom is making. A growing body of research supports the proposition that the religious competition inherent in religious freedom results in increased religious participation;¹⁰ and religious participation in turn can lead to a wide range of positive social and political outcomes, as discussed below. Furthermore, as religious groups make contributions to society and become an accepted part of the fabric of society, religious freedom is consolidated. This can be conceptualized as a *religious freedom cycle*.

Figure 3. The Religious Freedom Cycle



⁹ Grim, "God's Economy."

¹⁰ See Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000) and Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

In recent years, many studies have looked at the benefits of the social capital and spiritual capital generated through active civic and religious involvement.¹¹ As more people actively participate in religion, religious groups increasingly bring tangible benefits such as literacy, vocational, and health training, marital and bereavement counseling, poverty relief, and more. Faith-based organizations, for example, are the major providers of care and support services to people living with HIV/AIDS in the developing world,¹² and there is a growing scientific evidence of the health benefits associated with religious participation itself.¹³ Some studies suggest that the advent of new religious forms can help to improve the lives of women¹⁴ and activate greater civic participation.¹⁵

Established religions, however, often act to curtail competition from new religious groups by preventing proselytism,¹⁶ restricting conversion, and putting up barriers that

¹¹ A new initiative studying spiritual capital is funded by the John Templeton Foundation (http://www.templeton.org/funding_areas/core_themes/spiritual_capital/); for papers offering an analysis of religion from a 'religious economics' perspective, see: <http://www.religionomics.com/>.

¹² See Edward C. Green, "Faith-Based Organizations: Contributions to HIV Prevention" (Washington, DC: USAID, 2003).

¹³ See Harold G. Koenig, Michael E. McCullough, and David B. Larson, *Handbook of Religion and Health* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁴ For example, the growth of newcomer evangelical groups in Catholic areas has been argued to promote gender equality, See Christian Smith and Joshua Prokopy, eds., *Latin American Religion in Motion* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

¹⁵ See Eric M. Uslaner, "Religion and Civic Engagement in Canada and the United States." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41:2 (June 2002): 239-254, and Corwin Smidt, "Religion and Civic Engagement: A Comparative Analysis," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 565 (September 1999): 176-192.

¹⁶ Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam notes that diversity without activities aimed at integrating divergent groups can divide societies, but that activities such as proselytism and inter-religious marriage (both dependent on religious freedom) help social identities to become permeable and thus better integrate people into societies, See Robert E. Putnam, "E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century: The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 30:2 (June 2007): 137-174.

make it difficult for new religions to gain a foothold.¹⁷ My colleague Roger Finke and I recently published a study in the *American Sociological Review* which found that the attempt to restrict fair religious competition results in more violence and conflict, not less. Specifically, we found that social restrictions on religious freedom lead to government restrictions on religious freedom and the two act in tandem to increase the level of violence related to religion—which in turn cycles back and leads to even higher social and government restrictions on religion. This creates what we call the *religious violence cycle*.

Figure 5. The Religious Violence Cycle¹⁸
Structural Equation Model, 143 countries, populations > 2 million



Grim and Finke (2007), *American Sociological Review* 72(4):649

¹⁷ Some claim that the religious competition that resulted from the Reformation kept the Catholic Church from remaining a medieval religion. For a discussion of the controversies surrounding interpretations of the impact of the Reformation on religion, see Philip S. Gorski, “Historicizing the Secularization Debate: Church, State, and Society in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, ca. 1300 to 1700,” *American Sociological Review* 65 (2000): 138-167. Also, without competition, the Russian Orthodox Church easily became a tool of the Czars; see Adamantia Pollis, “Eastern Orthodoxy and Human Rights,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 15:2 (May 1993): 339-356.

¹⁸ In the ASR piece, “violence” is termed “persecution,” and is defined as the abuse or displacement of people due to religion.

Our research on 143 countries finds that when governments and religious groups in society do not erect barriers to religious competition but respect and protect such activities as conversion and proselytism, religious violence is less. A further analysis of the data shows that countries with no restrictions on conversion, in particular, tend to have higher levels of fundamental freedoms, better lives for women, and less overall armed conflict.¹⁹ These results offer a different perspective than the Clash of Civilizations theory, in that, rather than religious competition automatically leading to violence, the protection of fair religious competition actually leads to *less* religious violence.

One unique aspect of these findings is that social restriction of religious freedom (or social religious intolerance) drives government restrictions.²⁰ Examples include the social pressures in India for anti-conversion laws, calls for Shari'a law in northern Nigeria and parts of Indonesia, expulsions of evangelicals in Chiapas, Mexico,²¹ and

¹⁹ My analysis of data from Penn State's ARDA on restrictions to conversion in 196 countries shows that having no restrictions on conversions is significantly correlated (at least at $p < .05$, two-tailed) with economic freedom (.3), civil liberties (.6), political rights (.5), and press freedom (.5). They also relate to democracy (.4) and lower levels of armed conflict (.3). They correlate with higher income for females (.2), presence of females in legislatures (.5), higher percentages of female professional (.5), higher gender empowerment (.5), more expenditures on public health (.2), fewer people living below the poverty line (.3), a lower percent of GDP spent on the military (.5).

²⁰ The social restriction of religious freedom can be thought of as the gap between the value people place on living in a country with religious freedom for their own religion versus freedom for other religions. A recent survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life of populations in 10 countries from Asia, the Americas, and Africa found an average gap of 14 percentage points across the countries. For details see <http://pewforum.org/publications/surveys/pentecostals-06.pdf>.

²¹ Although these effects of social restrictions on religious freedom often play themselves out at the local or provincial level, they also play out at the transnational level. For example, on September 11, 2001, the World was introduced to the power of asymmetrical religion-related warfare, where religiously motivated non-state actors rained down violence upon thousands. 9/11 shows how the actions of religiously motivated social actors—many of whom came from Saudi Arabia, where religious freedom does not exist—lead to higher worldwide government restrictions of religion-related groups (rightly and wrongly) suspected of being like or related to Al Qaeda. As documented by the State Department, the pressures to reduce religious freedom for the sake of

numerous religious rebellions from China's long history.²² One of the clearest historical examples of the way social restrictions of religious freedom can feed into the religious violence cycle is the Holocaust. Research has shown that the Nazi government's violence toward Jewish people reinforced pre-existing social prejudices, creating a cycle of violence that was banally carried out with the support of many in German society.²³

A clear current example of the religious violence cycle can be seen in Iraq. The U.S. State Department concluded in 2007 that the religious freedom situation has dramatically deteriorated. In pre-invasion Iraq, life for many religious and ethnic communities was certainly dire, especially for Shiites and Kurds. However, in the years after the invasion, the Shi'a, who were previously targeted for violence, acquired the political reins, and with their newfound power, religiously oriented Shi'a parties successfully lobbied for the insertion of the so-called repugnancy clause in the recent Iraqi constitution, which requires that no law can contradict Islam. It essentially gives Islam, and advocates of Shi'a Islam in particular, veto power over any law in Iraq, lessening the power of any other religious group in the political process. This new political environment has exacerbated religious sectarian violence. In the process, minority religious groups ranging from Christians to Yazedis have been targeted. Now, the economy cannot get on its feet, democracy is not functioning, and women, especially in Baghdad by the account of many, have become virtual prisoners in their own homes for fear of unmentionable violence.

Conclusion

To quote sociologist Peter Berger, we are in an "age of explosive, pervasive religiosity."²⁴ Thus, it is essential to understand how the

security are real and growing in many countries today, representing a globalized version of the religious violence cycle.

²² See Vincent Y.C. Shih, *The Taiping Ideology: Its Sources, Interpretations, and Influences* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967).

²³ See William I. Brustein, *Roots of Hate: Anti-Semitism in Europe Before the Holocaust* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2003) Also see Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking, 1963).

²⁴ Peter Berger, "Religion in a Globalizing World," Pew Forum presentation, Key

affairs of nations and peoples are affected by religious freedom—in both its social and governmental aspects. The empirical data are clear on two points. First, religious freedom is part of the “bundled commodity” of human freedoms that energize broader productive participation in civil society by all religious groups, which is conducive to the consolidation of democracy and to socio-economic progress. Secondly, religious freedom reduces conflict and increases security by, among other things, removing grievances religious groups have toward governments and their fellow citizens.

In sum, religious freedom promotes stability, helps to consolidate democracy, and lessens religious violence. Based on an analysis of data, it is clear that religious freedom is much more than an American pet peeve; religious freedom is a universal aspiration. As another sociologist, N.J. Demerath, has said, the challenge for governments is to “set the rules for cultural conflict and assure an equitable framework for religious diversity.”²⁵

West, Florida, December 4, 2006, <http://pewforum.org/events/?EventID=136>.

²⁵ N.J. Demerath III, *Crossing the Gods: Worldly Religions and Worldly Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), p. 124.

A biblical theology of persecution and discipleship: Part 2 The historical books

Glenn M Penner*

Abstract

A truly biblical theology of persecution requires an understanding of a biblical view of history and of suffering. This article seeks to provide such an understanding through an examination of the Old Testament historical books, comparing the biblical view of history with Israel's surrounding cultures and an examination of suffering, discipline, and persecution as revealed in the historical books of Scripture.

Keywords Persecution, theology, Bible, historical books, history, suffering, discipline.

The Old Testament view of history

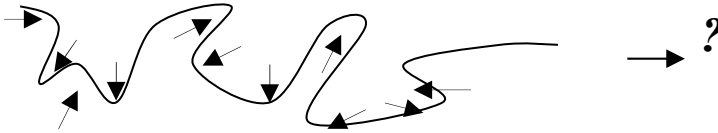
The study of how history was viewed by the peoples of the ancient world is a fascinating one. While time and space do not permit us the luxury of a thorough investigation, it is accurate to say that the Jews were rather unique in their view of history.

Speiser makes the keen observation that the Bible is not so much a chronicle of events and thoughts worth recording as it is an interpretation of significant happenings. The Bible is, thus, "essentially a philosophy of history" (Speiser 1976:2). The way that Israel viewed history was startling, particularly in comparison to the two dominant cultures with which it interacted: Egypt and Mesopotamia.

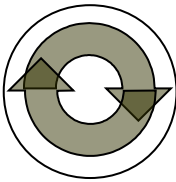
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By way of introduction, let me propose, by means of illustration, the Mesopotamian, the Egyptian, and the biblical views of history. An explanation will follow.

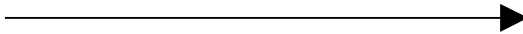
Mesopotamian



Egyptian



Biblical



The Day of the Lord

The Mesopotamian cultures¹ saw history as a chaotic meandering, subject to the whims of capricious, untrustworthy gods who might turn on them at any moment. No one, not even the gods, knew where history was going. No one god was the ultimate source of power and authority. Indeed, none were truly omnipotent (:3) Nothing in the universe was, therefore, permanent and absolute; nothing could be taken for granted. History was dynamic but unpredictable. The only hope of averting disaster or misfortune was by seeking to propitiate the gods somehow. Perhaps, it was hoped, some sort of favourable decision might be rendered on behalf of the one making the offering. Since the gods were capricious, this was never a certain thing. It was important, therefore, to find out what had apparently ‘worked’ in the past. If it could be shown that a certain offering or ritual had proved effective before, this provided a possible key to pleasing their deities in the present.

¹ Babylonian, Chaldean, Assyrian, Elam, Anatolian, Hurrian, Hittite, Ugarit, Alalakh.

The past then became very important as a check against the reoccurrence of past disasters (:4).² The past, it was hoped, might provide keys to knowing how to propitiate the gods. There was, therefore, a need for constant watchfulness and an increasingly elaborate ritual. “The cosmos, in short, lacked a true basis for an ethical approach to life. Form rather than content promised the best protection against the whims of heaven” (Speiser 1976:4; cf Halo & Simpson 1971:171-172).

The ziggurats are a prime example of the hopes of the Mesopotamians to forge a link between heaven and earth, between immortals and mortals in their pursuit of survival. The ziggurats also reflect the other tenet of the Mesopotamian worldview; the belief that human society was an exact replica of the society of the gods with the ziggurats serving as a link between the two. Just as no god could claim absolute divine authority, it was impossible for any human ruler to claim such rights. The concept of a divine ruler was foreign to Mesopotamian thought (Speiser 1976:3; Halo & Simpson 1971:175). The authority of the king was thus doubly restricted. As Speiser (1976:3) points out:

On the one hand, his mandate stemmed from the gods, to whom he was accountable for his every action. And on the other hand, the king was subject to the will of the assembly of his elders, just as the head of the pantheon was bound by the wishes of his celestial assembly.

These twin checks on the power of the mortal ruler – one cosmic and the other societal – had a direct effect on the Mesopotamian concept of state. In these circumstances, the state could evolve into nothing but a kind of democracy. For government by assembly and the circumscribed authority of the king could scarcely add up to anything else. The main beneficiary was the individual, whose rights were protected by the law – more specifically the cosmic, unalterable, and impersonal law called *kittum*, an approximate synonym of Hebrew *’emeth*. The ruler was ever the humble servant of the *kittum*, never its master. The presence of writing was a further safeguard against abuses or distortions on the part of the king.

These laws, which protected the rights of the individual, can be found in the vast numbers of documents that have been found in

² This emphasis is clearly seen in Mesopotamian war records where the perceived need for continued divine favour in battle seems to be strongly emphasized. Cf. Pritchard 1958:188-208.

Mesopotamian archeological digs. While this dynamic view of history resulted in societies run, for the most part, by the rule of law, the lack of an absolute authority made it impossible to determine whether the laws were ultimately right or moral. No values were ultimately enduring. The collapse of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires was ultimately due not so much to the superiority of their enemies than to the crushing weight of their internal structure as they sought to find form and security within the chaos of their worldview. The Mesopotamians were an expansionist, progressive people who, because of their worldview, had to keep looking over their shoulder in fear. Lacking absolute standards, they sought security in form and ritual that increasingly became too taxing to maintain. Trying to find a way to live securely in a chaotic universe, tragically, led eventually to their collapse.

The Egyptians, on the other hand, held to a static view of history. The cosmos of the Egyptians was the outcome of a single creative process, unlike the progression of events in the Mesopotamian (and biblical) creation story. There was no *kittum* concept among the Egyptians either. In its place was a personal absolute law in the person of the Pharaoh, the incarnation of the creator. The king was a god whose world was as stable and unchanging as the rhythm of the Nile and the constant shining of the sun (Speiser 1976:5; Livingston 1987:123). History was wrapped in the reign of the divine king. There was no codification of law as in Mesopotamia. The word of the Pharaoh became law as soon as the words were spoken. In the Pharaoh there was stability and order. As Livingston (1987:123) points out:

When the Pharaoh was crowned, he did not become a god; he was simply unveiled as a god. In the cult, the Pharaoh was high priest; in the government, his rule was the absolute; in war, he was the army; in art, he symbolized Egypt. The Pharaoh could delegate his power to others, and at times his underlings may have seemed more powerful than he; but his power was repeatedly reemphasized. There is no clear evidence that a real revolt of the people was ever mounted against him. Even invaders were absorbed into the concept of the Pharaoh's supremacy and ejected as soon as possible.

Since the kingship was supremely important, the Egyptians gave very little heed in their records to events not directly related to the throne (:100).³ The records make no reference to the predecessors of the

³ Cf. Pritchard 1958:173-187. As Livingston notes, one wonders at times how

Pharaoh or to his successors; history is the reign of the Pharaoh. The calendar begins with his coming to the throne and ends with his death. The linear concept of time with a continuous era was completely foreign to the Egyptian worldview. Frankfort (1958:20-21) notes:

The Egyptians had very little sense of history or of past and future. For they conceived their world as essentially static and unchanging. It had gone forth complete from the hands of the Creator. Historical incidents were, consequently, no more than superficial disturbances of the established order, or recurring events of never-changing significance. The past and the future – far from being a matter of concern – were wholly implicit in the present...the divinity of animals and kings, the pyramids, mummifications – as well as several other and seemingly unrelated features of Egyptian civilization – its moral maxims, the forms peculiar to poetry and prose – can all be understood as a result of a basic conviction that only the changeless is truly significant.⁴

To reconstruct a history of Egypt is notoriously difficult. Often private and business documents prove to be more reliable than royal ones. Records from western Asia that date from the same period – diplomatic treaties, trade, wars and other contacts with Egypt by other civilizations – often prove more enlightening than actual Egyptian documentation.

It is difficult to conceive how two cultures could have existed in such close proximity to each other, with frequent interaction between the two over thousands of years, yet socially and religiously they differed fundamentally.

With Israel in close relationship both historically and geographically, does the Bible reflect a similarity with either the Mesopotamian or Egyptian view of history? The answer is both yes and no.

Speiser (1976:9) argues:

It is abundantly clear today that, of the two major centres of civilization in the area, it was the distant Mesopotamia and not neighboring Egypt that left the deeper cultural impression upon Israel. This was to be expected. For in the first place, the patriarchs had their roots in the land across the Euphrates and in the second place, the Egyptian way was static and isolationist, whereas the Mesopotamian was dynamic and

much of these accounts are actually factual and how much is royal bragging.

⁴ Cf. Hallo & Simpson 1971:191; Bull 1955:1-33.

expansive – naturally suited to reach out to other lands, Israel included....

The independent evidence of the law, moreover, serves to emphasize the fact that in the wide area of cultural correspondence between Mesopotamia and Israel, we are likely to be confronted with cases of actual kinship as opposed to mere coincidence. In both societies the law was impersonal and supreme; the king was its servant and not its source and master. Furthermore, the respective legal disciplines are closely linked in spirit and in content, notwithstanding numerous differences in details. And because many of the features that are common to both lands can now be traced back to the very beginning of Mesopotamian civilization, Israel has to be regarded in this respect as the cultural descendant of Mesopotamia.

Despite their similarities, however, there are profound differences in the Mesopotamian and Israelite views of history. For example, I would disagree with Speiser that the law in Israel's case was impersonal. This is a critical area of difference. Israel's law was from a personal, covenant-making God whose character and will was reflected in the law. This is far cry from the Mesopotamian *kittum*. Because of the covenant, Israel saw history as being under the control of a single, omnipotent master who created all things, sustains all things and controls the course of history.⁵ Unlike the gods of the surrounding nations, Yahweh is distinct from all the other gods in that He cares for a people while all the other gods are concerned only for their lands. Unlike the gods of the nations, Yahweh's interests embrace all peoples in all places, not only those who worship Him.

History was, thus, seen as purposeful, not liable to the whims of capricious deities as in the Mesopotamian view, or the totalitarian authority of rulers with divine pretensions, as in the Egyptian view. History has meaning, for it is under the sovereign control of Almighty God (Trites 1977:40). From the biblical point of view, man is bestowed with responsibility, dignity, and hope (Speiser 1976:15).⁶ In a very real sense, the biblical view is a direct rejection of both the Mesopotamian and the Egyptian views of history (:10-11). History does matter (contra Egypt) but it is not out of control (contra Mesopotamia). Hence the believer has both hope and security as we

⁵ A particular unique aspect of the biblical view is the assertion that Yahweh controls not only the fortunes of Israel but of all nations, even those who do not worship Him and without the direct agency of His people. cf. Wright 2006:84-85.

⁶ Cf. Waltke 1980:371.

see history moving towards a climax, which the biblical authors call the 'Day of the Lord.'

In later times, the Jews would encounter the view of the Greeks who tended to see history as moving forwards and downwards. The golden age was past, and time was marching towards death, darkness and suffering. The Jews knew that the best was yet to come.

They looked ahead to a day when affliction and suffering would end and when justice would prevail. They knew that the present state of the world was abnormal. They recognised that this world is not all that there is. Hence, they avoided the stagnation that inevitably contributed to the collapse of the Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Greek civilizations.

In their history, Israel saw the hand of God at work, moving them and the rest of the world towards a final goal. Suffering and affliction was part of that plan; most often depicted as a punishment for sins, a means by which God sought to restore His people to fellowship with Himself, or, on the other hand, as a means of developing and revealing spiritual maturity in the lives of His people.

Sometimes, however, suffering has a value in the mind of God that is known only to Him and was not necessarily to be understood as a means of divine punishment or discipline.⁷ In such cases, it is enough for the child of God to know that God watches over even the dark and obscure ways (Gerstenberger & Schrage 1977:115). As we see in Genesis 3:14, God's plans for restoration require conflict, suffering and bruising of His people. It is true, as we shall see in the history of Israel, that sometimes God chose to use suffering to punish and restore the people to fellowship. Sometimes He used it for the spiritual training of His people. At other times, however, God's people suffer for reasons known only to Himself but which serve to effectively accomplish His purposes in history (:116).

Gerstenberger and Schrage (:116) rightfully point out that there is no unitary meaning of suffering to be drawn from the Old Testament. Attempts to find such inevitably come to a point where they fail because the attempt, itself, exhibits a lack of a basic attitude of trust in God. The call to the sufferer is to entrust the distress to One who is mightier and who understands all things.

⁷ Cf. Psalm 23:4; Gerstenberger & Schrage 1977:115.

Suffering in the historical texts

Discipline as punishment

It is at this point that we need to pause and discuss the biblical theme of ‘discipline’ because it is here that people often trip up. When we hear the word ‘discipline,’ we tend to think primarily in the context of punishment.

Christians in Sudan, for example, often see their suffering as punishment from God for sin. They are not sure what that sin may be, but they often speak of their suffering in this context. To be sure, discipline does involve punishment, but this is not the whole picture. Let us, however, begin from the familiar and move to the unfamiliar.

Throughout Israel’s history, as the people of God moved towards the Day of the Lord, the following cycle emerged:⁸



Looking at their life, they saw how their sins had resulted in God’s punishment, as He withdrew His favour and protection from them. They also knew that this same suffering could lead them to repentance and to a return to God’s covenant. Hence, suffering could also be the catalyst for their deliverance from sin and its consequences. Suffering could, thereby, result in God’s glory. In Leviticus 26:18, 24, 28 and Judges especially we see how God used suffering in the sense of corrective discipline for sin.

⁸ Chart adapted from Kreeft 1986:111.

Thus, in the history of Israel, we see:

- Sin and suffering are not permanent (history is going somewhere).
- Suffering may be a fruit of continuing sin.
- Suffering can be used by God to lead to repentance from sin and ultimately to the glory of God.

However, seeing the suffering of God's people in this context alone is inconsistent with the full revelation of God.⁹ Indeed, it is this author's conviction that one of the consequences of not having a solid biblical understanding of persecution is the tendency to confuse divine punishment and persecution.

A prime example of this was the weblog posted by James T. Draper, president of LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention for Baptist Press in August of 2005 entitled *They Are Praying, Watching And Waiting; What's Our Response?* (Draper 2005). This article was widely distributed, referenced and praised over the Internet for its call to a level of Christian commitment among Western Christians as evidenced by persecuted Christians in China. Unfortunately, for all of its merits, Draper demonstrated his misunderstanding of the nature of persecution when he suggested that persecution is one of the ways that God punishes His people when he stated that the American church may be "on the road to persecution, brought on because of our own arrogance." Persecution, he suggested, may be the means by which God will renew the Western church. As well meaning as Draper was, there is no biblical evidence to support this hope. He unfortunately confused God's judgment with the cost of discipleship. Persecution is the price that God's people experience due to their faithfulness in bringing the gospel to a fallen world, not God's punishment or disciplinary process. Taking Draper's statement as it stands, one might be led to believe the persecuted suffer due to sin in their lives or because they have done something wrong.

Discipline as a means to spiritual maturity

The concept that God's discipline can be a means to bring about spiritual maturity is probably most clearly seen in the New Testament but it is not absent in the Old Testament.

⁹ And would lead us to commit the error that Gerstenberger and Schrage warn us against.

In Deuteronomy 8, the suffering of the people in the wilderness is referred to as ‘discipline’ to discover what was in the heart of the people (8:2). By this they were to learn that man does not live by bread alone but by everything that comes from the mouth of the Lord (8:3). In this, they were to know that God was disciplining them as a father disciplines his son (8:5).

Elsewhere in the Old Testament we see this same imagery of God training, correcting, instructing and providing for his children as a Father. Discipline gives the assurance of sonship, seeking to create in the life of the child a God-centred way of life that expresses itself in obedience and ethical behaviour.

In Psalm 94:12-14, it is God’s discipline through the teaching of His Word that is evidence that the Lord has not forsaken His people:

Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O Lord, and whom you teach out of your law, to give him rest from days of trouble, until a pit is dug for the wicked. For the Lord will not forsake his people; he will not abandon his heritage.

Understanding discipline in this manner, it is not hard to see how God can use persecution as an instrument of discipline for spiritual maturity but not as punishment for sin.

Suffering specifically for God’s sake

The Old Testament historical books record several incidents of what we would commonly understand as persecution; suffering for doing what is good or, more specifically, because of one’s allegiance to the living God.

1. David was described as a man after God’s own heart. Yet we read that Saul “was determined to put David to death” (1 Sam 20:33; cf. 1 Sam 18-27) because of God’s appointment of him to be Saul’s successor.
2. Eighty-five priests of Nob were killed by Saul and Doeg (1 Sam. 22).
3. God’s prophets were hunted and killed by Queen Jezebel and King Ahab (1 Kgs 19:10, 14). One hundred of them were hidden and fed by Obadiah, head of the king’s household, in direct violation of his orders (1 Kgs 18:3-4). We find here perhaps the earliest example of civil disobedience. We may

deduce, as well, that the care of these one hundred ‘dissidents’ was likely done, illegally, at the expense of the royal treasury, at great risk to Obadiah. To feed and water one hundred men over an extended period of time, even if only on bread and water, was no small task and would have taken considerable resources in the midst of a drought and famine.

4. Elijah was persecuted by Ahab and Jezebel, leading to his flight to the desert (1 Kgs 18:10-19:2).
5. The prophet Micaiah was imprisoned by King Ahab, falsely accused of troublemaking rather than prophesying in the name of the Lord (2 Chr 18:12-26).
6. Elisha was threatened with death by the king (2 Kgs 6:31).
7. The prophet Hanani was imprisoned by King Asa (2 Chr 16:7-10).
8. The prophet Zechariah was executed at King Joash's command (2 Chr 24:20-22).
9. We are told that “Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another” (2 Kgs 21:16).
10. In 2 Chronicles 36:16 in words reminiscent of Jesus’ in Matthew 23:23-35, we are told that God, because of His compassion persisted in sending messengers to His people, but they were consistently mocked and rejected.
11. In the book of Esther, the Persian King Ahasuerus persecuted the Jews under the influence of his advisor Haman. Mordecai was a special object of Haman’s attacks (Esth 3:1-12; 5:14).

Conclusion

A study of the Old Testament historical texts is essential in developing a biblical theology of persecution. First, an understanding that history has meaning and is under divine control helps us to see persecution as not being outside of God’s plan but as being even essential to His method of reconciling the world to Himself. An understanding of the biblical view of suffering helps us to avoid simplistic answers, concluding that all suffering is the result of sin or a means of bringing about spiritual maturity. The historical books also clearly provide examples of suffering for righteousness or because of one’s allegiance to God, identifying with His people or participating in His purposes.

Persecution is clearly not simply a New Testament phenomenon and a true biblical theology must acknowledge this. Present-day persecuted Christians will find comfort and hope in knowing that persecution has been the lot of God's people from the very beginning and that it has significance in fulfilling the purposes of God.

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Minding the gaps: Overcoming misconceptions of persecution

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Abstract

In this article, five misconceptions are surveyed that often attend to theological reflections on religious persecution. It will be argued that these misconceptions represent gaps in our perspectives of a proper theology of persecution and must be overcome if reflection is to adequately account for the way in which persecution occurs.

Keywords Persecution, eschatology, Early Church, Majority World, suffering, martyrdom.

Introduction

The amount of popular literature concerning itself with persecution is numerous. Yet when we pair this abundance with the number of works researched and published from a sound theological perspective, we are left with an apparent imbalance. Not only are theological reflections on persecution few in number, but as the author seeks to demonstrate in the present study, it is often the case that when authors do reflect theologically upon persecution, they tend to do so in a manner which is rather underdeveloped. Of course, works, the purpose of which is to survey a particular persecution situation or relate the experiences of their persecuted authors, are plentiful. Indeed, it is possible for narrative such as this to function as theology, but we must still wonder if it can suffice when it comes to the pressing need for robust theologies of persecution.

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In the end, for all of the literature devoted to some aspect of religious persecution, the lack of sound theological reflection gives way to gaps between malformed thoughts. If we are to reflect accurately on religious persecution we must be mindful of these gaps as we seek to overcome the build-up of misconceptions and faulty thinking. As a starting point for such efforts, the areas in which theological reflection has perhaps fallen short are pointed out. In minding these gaps, future theological reflection may perhaps be more thorough and effective.

Is persecution only an eschatological experience?

To begin with, the works that view persecution as an event only manifesting itself in the period of time nearest to the Eschaton, are examined. Works like these often acknowledge occurrences of persecution during various periods in Christian history, but these are ultimately interpreted by pointing in some way to Christ's Second Coming and the accompanying events.

For instance, at the close of the last century Larry Poland (1990:41) asserted in his book *The coming persecution* that, "[h]ere at the end of the century ... there is a convergence of dynamics which, *for the first time ever*, has prepared the world for the fulfilment of the final fifth of God's revealed scenarios" (emphasis in original). Essentially, what Scripture has foretold for the future is this generation's present scenario (Poland 43 57). Poland goes on to say that the increasing evil in the world is unprecedented. Similarly, the increasing presence of famine, earthquakes, warfare, false messiahs, and "uniformitarian thinking" (scoffing at the Bible and its relation to history, science, etc.) can only be understood as "labour pains" that Christ himself foretold (Poland 1990:53 56; 43 125). The "labour pains" Poland speaks of, which include various forms of persecution, point to an imminent period of intense persecution. All of this, according to Poland, is a part of Satan's strategy in the final phase of earthly, human history (Poland :127 143). At this time, believers in Christ, under the strain of persecution, will cry out to God for deliverance, marking the advent of Christ's Second Coming.

Hal Lindsey (1970), author of the popular work *The late great planet earth*, shares Poland's view of a world growing in evil in direct fulfilment of biblical prophecy. According to Lindsey, these events are followed by a period known as the Great Tribulation. In a later work, Lindsey (1994:269) details the events prior to this period and writes:

“... the world seems poised on the brink of a period of bigotry and persecution unparalleled since the days of the early church.” He goes on to cite examples of persecution in the United States stemming from liberalism, humanism, Hollywood’s poor treatments of religion, a biased media, and society’s overall hatred of traditional Christianity (Lindsey 1994:272 277). These, along with more severe circumstances around the globe, are a part of a coming persecution, part of the “end-times” activity that Scripture has foretold. Lindsay (1994:279) concludes, “... for those of us living in this world today as we approach an age of growing persecution, there’s something else to look forward to. For God promises that he will take His flock out of this world just before the persecution becomes most unbearable.”

For Poland, Lindsey, and others like them, the persecution of Christians is an event that ultimately finds itself in the period of time nearest to the Eschaton. Persecution that is occurring presently is seen only as “labour pains” and as a signpost for things to come. So, while proponents of this view may acknowledge occurrences of persecution here and there, it is ultimately an eschatological event. Persecution that occurs before the Eschaton merely points to this final period. Viewing persecution in this manner leaves Christians in the West, where this view is most common, unable to see and respond to their present experience of persecution. They are only able to think of it in terms of a violent event that is yet to come. Thus, they are seemingly unaware of the non-violent and less apparent occurrences of persecution that they themselves endure. If Christians are unwilling to acknowledge the current presence of persecution, they are often unable to appropriately respond to and reflect on it.

Moreover, the religious persecution of Christians, acknowledged, but viewed only as an eschatological experience, effectively minimizes the Early Church’s experience of persecution and the generations of believers thereafter. As the works of Poland and Lindsay demonstrate, any occurrence of persecution is equated with “end-times” activity. Thus, even persecution occurring before the future Great Tribulation is interpreted in terms of Christ’s return and the Church’s place in that event (Poland 1990:158 174). These are merely experiences that precede this generation’s “labour pains,” which themselves point to the experience of great persecution that matters most. The fact remains that Christians have been persecuted since the inception of the Church, which has seen persecution

situations of greater or lesser degrees throughout its history. One cannot deny the present and historical experiences of the Church and thus see persecution only in the light of the Eschaton.

Adding to this misguided thinking are those whose view of eschatology allows for a pre-tribulation rapture. Here, believers are taken up to meet Christ before the time of great persecution on earth. Paul Marshall (1997:159) effectively labels this view “The Great Escape”. It contributes to the idea that there is a period of persecution coming, but not yet here. Before it comes though, believers in Christ will be spared. Christians who depend on this escape are left not only unaware of their own experience of persecution, but even worse, they are simply unaware of the intense persecution that occurs in many areas of the Majority World. Believers in these regions must wonder then, where is our “Great Escape”? If persecution is an eschatological event that Christians can avoid, there is no incentive to deal with what is presently occurring in any part of the world. At most, present persecution points to Christ’s Second Coming and will only hasten his return.

In the end, seeing persecution only as an eschatological event forces Christians to deny their current experience, interpret it only in terms of the Eschaton, and/or view persecution as a future event that they will be spared from. This, in essence, leaves Christians preparing for an experience that is yet to come, instead of giving theological reflection to something that is an expected part of their Christian discipleship in the here-and-now. Christians who hold this perspective are effectively left without the ability to understand and respond to an experience that should be a part of everyday Christian living, both in the West and the Majority World, not just something that may or may not point to the future (Hoekema 1979:150 151).

Is persecution only an isolated historical experience?

While various scholars view persecution as a future event, others view it as only occurring within a specific period of history. Ugandan theologian Dan Kyanda (1979:98) refers to this view as the “historical exemption” in light of the opinion of some that persecution simply “doesn’t happen anymore.” Instead, such Christians believe that religious persecution was carried out only against the Early Church and all but ended with Constantine and the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D. (Schirrmacher 2001:25 27).

The story of persecution prior to the fourth century is indeed familiar to many Christians. These events began in Jerusalem and essentially followed the Church as they spread throughout the Roman Empire. As the number of cases of persecution grew during and subsequent to this time, Christianity took on an increasing majority role. Following the Edict of Milan and Theodosius' rule, declaring Christianity the Empire's official religion in 380 A.D., intense persecution became much less frequent. With the rise of Christendom, the story of Christianity as a minority and suppressed religion became a dominant force in the Western world. For those familiar only with this story, persecution is merely an isolated historical experience.

What is less well known, is the intense persecution that continued to occur before, during, and beyond Constantine on the fringes of the Empire and outside it. In Persia, for instance, Christians who found refuge from Roman persecution began to experience it from the Sassanians touting Zoroastrianism as the national religion (Moffett 1992:106). While these initial outbreaks were fairly minor, they began to grow in intensity (106-109). As Moffett remarks, "[f]aced with what seemed to be a double threat, a threat not only to national security but to the national religion as well, Persia's priests and rulers cemented their alliance of state and religion in a series of periods of terror that have been called the most massive persecution of Christians in history..." (Moffett 1992:138).

Stories like these seem to escape the minds of many Christians, often those from the West. For these individuals, their knowledge of history and the Church moves westward with Constantine. Accordingly, their knowledge of a Church that is intimately acquainted with persecution is minimal. Consequently, the idea that Christians continued to be persecuted after the Church's first three centuries and throughout the world today is a surprise. Nina Shea (1997:5) concurs, writing, "[m]ost Westerners are shocked to learn that Christians are still being persecuted throughout the world" and Marshall (1997:xxii) adds that persecution, "... may in the comfortable worlds of western Christians seem more suited to biblical texts and ancient Roman history than to evening newscasts, more a product of mission-board puffery than hard fact." Thus, despite a consistent presence of persecution throughout history and even today, many Christians simply remain unaware of it (xxii).

This unawareness may in fact be the result of an inadequate definition of persecution. If Christians understand persecution only to be violent, physical acts, then they tend to associate such events with a specific period of history, namely the Early Church. This is because these Christians, mostly coming from the West, do not see such violent acts in their own society. Marshall adds that additional reasons for this lack of knowledge, including a Western theology that stresses success, prosperity, and inner peace, a nationalist form of Christianity that confuses God and state, lack of information, and, as was noted above, an obsession with end-times prophecy (Marshall 1997:152). Shea adds that this unawareness is also the natural result of a lack of attention by influential groups like media, the fact that many intensely persecuted Christians do not tell their story because it is a part of everyday life and/or for fear of retribution, and even an intentional disregard for acts of persecution (Shea 1997:13 16; 17 24). A division between Western and Majority World Christians, such that Westerners are unable to identify with a faith that deals with such severe threats on a daily basis, could also be noted as a reason behind unawareness of persecution.

In the end, viewing persecution as an isolated historical experience, having occurred only in the Early Church, denies the experience of Christians living from the fourth century onward. Likewise, it denies the experience of many of those living in the Majority World, Christians who often live with the daily threat of intense forms of persecution. Stemming from this, Western Christians are themselves confused about the presence of persecution in their own societies. As a result, theological reflection is severely hampered at a time when it is greatly needed.

Is persecution only the experience of Majority World Christians?

Other viewpoints see religious persecution as only the experience of Christians living in the Majority World. In these regions, many Christians do indeed live with the daily threat of intense persecution. This type of experience is rarely seen by Western Christians within their own societies which are generally tolerant of religions. Thus, due to the absence of this far more apparent type of persecution, it is said by proponents of this viewpoint that this is not the experience of

Western Christians, but rather, that it only occurs within Majority World Christianity.

In his book *Called to suffer, called to triumph*, Herbert Schlossberg (1990:237) closes his work by saying, “[t]hose who do not go through it [persecution] are part of the fortunate few. They should ... seek to ... help those whose experience is closer to the norm.” According to Schlossberg (1990:15; 20; 21), persecution is subject to the ebb and flow of time. It occurs in a certain place at a certain moment. Then, as conditions change, persecution will shift to another area, perhaps at a different period of time. For Schlossberg (1990:20), the history of persecution gives evidence of it, “... arising, then cooling off, and then coming to life again.” Using case studies, Schlossberg hopes to illustrate that it is presently areas such as Asia, Africa, and the former Soviet Union that are, or at least were at the close of the last century, the current stage of religious persecution. Thus, for Schlossberg, religious persecution of Christians is, at the present moment, only the experience of Majority World Christians.

Brother Andrew (1979:17) displays similar views in his work *Destined to suffer?* He writes early on that, “[persecution] ... has already come, gradually or suddenly, upon ... half of the ... Body of Christ.” He goes on to assert that persecution has yet to come to the West. It is an experience that will confront this area eventually, but for now, it is only the experience of those in the Majority World (Brother Andrew 1979:51). Like Schlossberg, then, the persecution that Brother Andrew has in mind occurs in certain areas whilst it is absent from others. It is thus only the present experience of Majority World Christians.

In similar fashion, Scott Cunningham (1977:340) demonstrates this perspective when he writes that the Church of the West is quite distant from a theology and experience that has religious persecution at its core. Accordingly, “... the North American Christian may neither experience persecution nor be aware that others do ...” (Cunningham 1977:341). For Cunningham, persecution is the very real and everyday experience of Christians in the Majority World. Consequently, they are able to apply the lessons of the very Early Church to their own situations. Much more, they are better able to respond to their experience. As for the West, Cunningham is admittedly confused as to the appropriate biblical application. For him, a theology which

addresses persecution, must surely be, "...troubling to Western believers who, perhaps because they have become culturally acceptable, know nothing of that experience" (Cunningham 1977:342). Once again, persecution is seen as the experience of only Majority World Christians.

This viewpoint stems from similar misconceptions described above. As noted earlier, Christians who see persecution only as an isolated historical experience are not only unaware of present circumstances and Church history, but they are also confused concerning an appropriate definition of persecution. Furthermore, some Christians, many being from the West, associate persecution with violent acts. When they do not see this violence against religion occur in their own society, they often associate it with a specific period of history. Likewise, Christians who acknowledge the presence of persecution in the contemporary world, but operate from a similar definition, often understand persecution as being only the experience of Majority World Christianity, for in their minds this is where violent and physical persecution is most prevalent.

All three authors surveyed in this section, the positive contributions of their work notwithstanding, demonstrate this very confusion. While Schlossberg (1990:17) acknowledges a range of types of persecution, he only cites examples of intense persecution and/or significant religious restriction which occur in the Majority World. In fact, he acknowledges a difference in how the term is used. While mentioning persecution to a pastor in what is now the Czech Republic, he was told that Christians in that area were not persecuted. This was because these Christians did not experience "... beatings, imprisonment, and being put to death" However, as Schlossberg (1990:17) soon discovered, these Christians had to take a significant number of precautions to ensure the safety and secrecy of their worship services. Brother Andrew and Cunningham seem to understand persecution in similarly truncated ways (Brother Andrew 1974:23; Cunningham 1977:340 342). As this author understands it, persecution is any unjust action of varying levels of hostility perpetrated primarily on the basis of religion and directed at Christians, resulting in varying levels of harm as it is considered from the victim's perspective (Tieszen 2008). Understood theologically, the experience of Western Christians, albeit much less physically violent,

is in agreement with such a definition. Thus, their experience can be understood as religious persecution.

The inadequacy of this third misconception is further demonstrated in qualitative statements that contradict biblical evidence. As Schlossberg (1990:237) writes, “[p]ersecution is part of the normal Christian experience, a consequence of the desire to follow Christ with faithfulness.” Brother Andrew agrees, citing Scripture throughout that assures those who truly seek to follow Christ in the experience of religious persecution (Brother Andrew 1979:3). Cunningham (1977:341) writes, “Christians should expect persecution as an integral part of discipleship”, based on his own biblical theology of the event. Even so, elsewhere he insists that the Church of the West knows nothing of this experience. In fact, he ponders the relationship of a lack of discipleship with that of a lack of persecution (Cunningham 1977:342). Thus, even though each author acknowledges the biblical perspective that every Christian will experience persecution, they see only a specific population of the Church enduring it. In essence, each author raises contradictory issues when it comes to their view that persecution only occurs in the Majority World.

Is persecution the same as suffering in general?

The authors of *Joy through the night* (Spencer and Spencer 1994:19) demonstrate another misconception when they equate general suffering with persecution. Early on in their work, they outline four biblical categories through which suffering might be explained. Persecution, an aspect of “advancing God’s reign,” is one of them. In this light, persecution is understood to occur as a result of “... further[ing] God’s rule over this wicked and rebellious world” (Spencer and Spencer 1994:19). The authors add that persecution stems from evil, and thus, the death of one of the author’s family members is seen as a type of persecution (76). They also distinguish between “life-threatening” persecution, which they attribute to the Early Church, and “everyday” persecution. This, the authors connect with such experiences as losing one’s car to theft, being harassed by motorists on the street, and being treated as a second-class citizen based on the location of one’s residence (77 78). For these authors, there seems to be no major distinction between intense religious

persecution and unfortunate circumstances, other than the level of threat it imposes. It seems that they mistake their suffering for religious persecution.

In similar fashion, there are those who set out to treat the subject of suffering, but in doing so, misinterpret what is actually meant by religious persecution. Douglas John Hall, in his book *God and human suffering*, astutely examines the subject of suffering and how Christians might respond to and interact with it. Yet he states that “[t]here is more about the suffering of the church in the newer Testament’s writings than about any other single ecclesiastical theme. Not only is the suffering of the church [sic] the specific motif of whole documents ... but it looms large in all the literature of the newer Testament” (Hall 1986:123). With this statement Hall displays a curious blurring of lines between general suffering and religious persecution. Joel Williams is perhaps more accurate when he writes, “[p]ersecution is an aspect ... that is a prominent theme in the New Testament ...” (Larkin and Williams 1998:245). Seen in this light, it seems that Hall mistakes religious persecution for suffering in general.

With these two examples in mind, it is apparent that the distinctions between suffering and religious persecution in particular are rather fine. Even so, it seems clear that there is a need to distinguish between the two. To that end, while those who are persecuted suffer, those who suffer are not necessarily persecuted. While in a sense it is true that the source of religious persecution is evil and the Evil One, as Spencer and Spencer assert above, it is also true that the source of suffering for all humankind is ultimately the Evil One in a fallen world. In other words, Satan directs his evil at all of humankind, regardless of their religious persuasion. So, to think of suffering and persecution as the same event merely because they originate from the same source is not fully correct (Spencer and Spencer 1994:75). Furthermore, attributing to suffering what is best understood as persecution effectively downplays the presence of religious persecution. In societies where religious persecution is less apparent there is a tendency to view it or apply biblical texts relating to it to situations that in reality should not be understood in such terms (Penner 2004:8 9). As Glenn Penner points out, “[b]ecause the biblical texts on persecution cannot be readily applied to a setting where there is [less apparent] ... persecution, the tendency seems to be ... to misapply these passages to situations of general physical,

psychological, and spiritual suffering” (Penner 2004:8; Schirrmacher 2001:29ff.). Thus, in situations where the nature and definition of persecution are confused, its significance and the ability of Christians to appropriately respond to it are minimized.

Is persecution the same as martyrdom?

Finally, there are those whose views connect martyrdom and religious persecution so closely that the former is effectively emphasised at the expense of the latter. To be true, there is indeed a close relationship between the two. If one is martyred, it is because he or she was persecuted in such a way as to result in death. In other words, a martyr’s experience preceding his or her death is understood as religious persecution. It is the actual death of an individual that qualifies them as a martyr. Thus, one cannot experience martyrdom apart from his or her experience of persecution.

This close connection is helpful in a variety of ways. For instance, martyrdom is usually a specific event in time that is often recorded, or at least has the potential to be easily recorded. In this light, martyrdom provides the simplest way in which to quantify not only martyrs, but the presence of persecution as well. Such statistics are helpful in providing a fuller understanding of the Church’s experience of persecution and martyrdom. These statistics help us realise that Christian martyrdom has seen a steady increase since the Church’s beginning, it is not just the experience of one particular era. From this we can make similar conclusions regarding the persecution of Christians as a direct result of its close relationship with martyrdom.

Yet the fact remains that even though one cannot be martyred without being persecuted, one can be persecuted without being martyred. Consequently, if focus is given only to martyrdom, without setting any specific parameters, the experience of those who are persecuted, but not killed, is neglected. It is this aspect of persecution that is often overrun by overemphasizing the close relationship between martyrdom and persecution (Boyd-MacMillan 2006:21 22).

This oversight often occurs in efforts to survey the presence of persecution. For example, the authors of *By their Blood* (Hefley and Hefley 1979:589), a book meant to extend the work of Foxe’s Book of Martyrs, seem to equate persecution with martyrdom when they wrote

before the close of the twentieth century, "... another edition of this book may include martyrs in the 1980s and 1990s from countries which have not yet been torn by religious persecution. Christians in nations which have religious freedom now should thank God every day for this blessing which is denied their brothers and sisters elsewhere." They seem to suggest that where there is persecution there is, or will be, martyrdom, yet as was clarified above, this is simply not always the case.

Conclusion

The five categories presented above illustrate gaps and truncated thinking when it comes to many theological treatments of religious persecution, treatments which are admittedly few in number. More than this, they illustrate that where such gaps exist, our theological reflections are misguided and severely hampered. While viewing persecution as an eschatological experience does draw attention to the hope found in Christ's return (Pobee 1985:101; 110 118), it does not adequately deal with the consistent experience of Christians in every era of the Church's history. Viewing persecution as an isolated historical experience, particularly that of the Early Church, acknowledges the events of the past, but it does not acknowledge the persecution that occurs in the present. Furthermore, where persecution is viewed as only occurring during the Church's first three centuries, we see a lack of knowledge of the exact nature of persecution. Acknowledging the experience of Majority World Christians brings the presence of persecution out from the confines of the Early Church to the place and time when it is at its worst. This awareness is greatly needed, but not at the expense of confusing the nature of persecution that also exists in the West in addition to contradicting biblical statements. If persecution is viewed alongside or within general human suffering we see additional confusion and minimization of the experience of religious persecution. Finally, viewing persecution as martyrdom effectively minimizes the experience of Christians who do not die for their faith, but live with persecution. Using martyrdom to illustrate the presence of persecution or to quantify it does not justify an inappropriate conjoining of the two experiences. With these misconceptions in mind, we are left with a road to a theology of persecution that is marked by significant gaps.

It can be said that those who might best be able to fill in these gaps are those whose experience of persecution is most intimate. However, because of the intensely hostile nature of their persecution, they are often unable to devote significant time to thinking, writing, and sharing their reflections. In this light, perhaps these Christians can be excused for the lack of theological attention persecution receives. The rest of the Church, however, cannot be excused even if their experience, whether they acknowledge it or not, is of only mildly hostile forms of persecution. Perhaps the study above can in some way serve as a call to Christians, especially those most familiar with persecution to offer their theological reflections and for those who are less acquainted with persecution to support the former in their endeavour.

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Between advocacy and readiness to suffer: Religious liberty and persecution of Christians as topics at the World Evangelical Alliance General Assembly and its Mission Commission Consultation 2008

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Abstract

The World Evangelical Alliance, which represents 420 million Christians, held its General Assembly in Pattaya, Thailand in October 2008, with a global consultation of its Mission Commission in its wake. At both gatherings the complementary emphases of advocacy for persecuted Christians on the one hand and readiness to suffer for Christ on the other hand played a major role. The General Assembly gave more prominence to advocacy, while the Mission Commission Consultation emphasised more the willingness to suffer with Christ in God's mission. The WEA Religious Liberty Commission and the International Institute for Religious Freedom played a major role in making advocacy one of the major issues at the General Assembly. A study process and small expert consultation on developing an evangelical theology of suffering, persecution and martyrdom for the global church in mission is in planning.

Keywords World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), conference, consultation, declaration, General Assembly, Mission Commission, Religious Liberty Commission, International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF), advocacy, suffering, persecution, martyrdom, religious freedom, religious liberty, evangelical theology.

In October 2008 the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) held its General Assembly, which takes place every six years. The WEA is a network of churches from 128 nations that have each formed a national evangelical alliance and over 100 international organisations joining together to give a worldwide identity, voice, and platform to more than 420 million evangelical Christians. More than 500 senior evangelical leaders gathered for the assembly in Pattaya, Thailand from 25 to 30 October 2008.

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The conference programme allocated one day each to: global evangelism through transformational churches, addressing global poverty (Micah Network), public square engagement for effective change, and, what is of interest for this report, advocacy for the voiceless and the persecuted church.

The WEA has six working commissions and most of them used the occasion of the General Assembly to meet for a consultation of their own before or after the General Assembly. The Mission Commission was one of them. It met for four days with the triple topic of, (i) mission and contextualisation, (ii) mission and spirituality, and (iii) mission in the context of suffering, violence, persecution and martyrdom. The purpose of this article is to present and analyse the complementary approaches to the issues of religious liberty, persecution of Christians, and their suffering in mission. The other function is to investigate new developments emerging from those conferences.

Religious liberty at the WEA General Assembly

“An ever-present preoccupation”

As this was my first attendance of a WEA General Assembly (GA), I asked the chairman of the Religious Liberty Commission (RLC), John Langlois, who has served the WEA in various positions since 1969, to what degree the topics of religious freedom and persecution of Christians featured at the earlier GAs that he could remember. According to his notes, during the four decades he served the WEA, the issue of persecution had always been a prominent topic. In the 1970s there was brutal persecution of Christians, particularly in the Communist world – Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, Cuba and the Peoples Republic of China. This was of great concern to the WEA. In the 1980s it was the same as in the previous decade, but with emerging active persecution in the Muslim world, starting with Iran in 1979. In the 1990s the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellites eased the situation there, but persecution in China, North Korea and other countries, such as Vietnam continued, as well as increasing persecution in the Muslim world.

At the WEA General Assembly held in Manila, Philippines, in August 1992, Langlois, as Chairman of the RLC, awarded the first

Religious Liberty Award to Romulo Saune from Peru for his work in protecting Christians from the ‘Shining Path’ guerillas. Saune was murdered six weeks later. The presentation of the award was the most prominent event at that General Assembly. At the General Assembly held in Abbotsford, Canada, in May 1997, a delegate from Malaysia suggested that the WEF (at that time the WEA was called World Evangelical Fellowship) should send delegations to countries where Christians were suffering severe persecution. He made a special appeal to the WEF to send a delegation to the Sudan. The Evangelical Fellowship of Asia appealed to its members and others to extend their financial assistance to the people of North Korea who at the time, were facing acute famine and starvation and the General Assembly joined in with this request. At the Assembly in Abbotsford Brother Andrew spoke of the needs of the persecuted church. At the General Assembly held in Kuala Lumpur in 2001 there was extensive coverage of persecution and the RLC played a significant role.

Langlois notes:

Looking back I realise that the persecution of our brothers and sisters has been an ever-present preoccupation with the constant reminder that the WEA first took active steps regarding persecution in 1852 when it sent a delegation to the Turkish sultan to plead for the Armenians. Although we did not have a Religious Liberty Commission until 1992 we were active throughout. I can remember in the 1980s attending a conference in Bad Blankenburg organised by the WEA for the general secretaries of all the Evangelical alliances in the socialist world. It is the one conference which is etched in my memory like no other.

Plenary

The programme on advocacy for the persecuted church at the General Assembly in Thailand 2008 was prepared by the Religious Liberty Commission. The main presentation was given by its outgoing executive director, Rev. Johan Candelin from Finland who, after serving in that position for 12 years, is now focusing on his tasks as Goodwill Ambassador of the WEA and with the First Step Forum. He underlined the importance of religious freedom, and its prominence on the agenda of the WEA, reminding participants that a delegation of the Alliance went to Turkey in 1846 “and it still does so today.” In a remarkably self-critical tone, he pointed out the weaknesses of evangelical churches in particular and Christianity in general, being

sadly divided and not giving each other the support they could. He criticised the tendency to see people outside one's own circles as enemies instead of possible friends and real brothers and sisters in Christ. This could be remedied by a stronger "kingdom identity." Highlighting three major challenges he pointed to conflicts within states which increase religious tensions, the assertion of the sovereignty of a state which might be played out against religious freedom advocacy and the search for national identity in a number of countries making up half of the world population (India, China, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Pakistan). Among the steps he recommended was for national alliances to meet their own governments and for them to take the lead in defining their image. He suggested they present themselves and request to be informed what they could do for the nation. He encouraged Christians to build bridges, to be proactive and to take initiatives, such as starting a WEA business forum, which could send groups of investors to countries that needed strengthening in their pursuit of religious freedom. He thought it necessary to arrange and call for global demonstrations at times, while insisting that they should not be directed against a nation but for the religious freedom of its citizens. The delegates were impressed by the constructive and positive message of this religious freedom statesman.

During a panel discussion in a plenary session selected assembly participants from around the globe, shared experiences of persecution. One house church leader reported how he was denied citizenship in his South-East Asian country for 29 years, and how only a fraction of applications for registration submitted by house churches have actually been registered up to now. He underlined the importance of unity among registered and unregistered house churches. A participant from Sri Lanka explained that Buddhists there had the perception that "the cross followed the sword of colonialism" which gave a negative image to Christians. In a report on India it was explained how Christians were hated simply for being Christians and because they empower the poor, thereby becoming the only competitors to nationalists who hold the power. It was deplorable that Christians living in India have to experience Hinduism "as less than a peace loving religion." The massive persecution and displacement of Christians in Orissa going on for months was a major concern to the assembly. Another focal point was the fate of Christians in Iraq, of

whom millions were uprooted, and two million live in refugee camps outside Iraq. In response to the attitude of many Christians in the West who think that persecution is not their problem, one speaker coined the phrase: “If there is not religious freedom for all, there is no religious freedom at all.” Christians were encouraged to prepare for suffering by praying and reading the Bible, which deals a lot with persecution, and to defend themselves legally and politically.

Resolution

The *Resolution on Religious Freedom and Solidarity with the Persecuted Church*¹ will probably become the contribution to the topic by the General Assembly with the widest effect beyond the meeting. It is one of six major resolutions of the Assembly setting out an evangelical response to issues of religious liberty, HIV/AIDS, poverty, peacemaking, creation care and the global financial crisis. Four of the resolutions were prepared beforehand by interest groups, and a fifth was commissioned because of the global financial crisis which was unfolding while the conference was in session. Drafts on five major issues were circulated during the conference with requests for feedback, resubmitted in revised form and then formally adopted during the business meeting in the late afternoon of the last full day. Only during the business meeting on the penultimate day did a French delegate ask why there was no resolution on religious liberty, even though the preceding hours of the day had been dedicated to the topic. In reply the directors of the International Institute for Religious Freedom of the World Evangelical Alliance drafted a resolution virtually over supper which included the suggestions made by the petitioner, concerns voiced during the day, and input from the WEA Religious Liberty Commission. The draft was tabled at the evening plenary session and a revised version was circulated at the closing session of the gathering the next morning and then officially adopted by the International Council of the WEA the day thereafter.

Already in its title the resolution shows a dual focus – concern for religious freedom for all people, and the solidarity of Christians with the persecuted church. The short statement of 14 paragraphs is structured in four uneven sections. The opening paragraph affirms the history of the WEA working towards religious freedom since its inception in 1846. The next six paragraphs outline what the WEA

¹ Available online: www.worldevangelicals.org [Accessed: 30 November 2009].

affirms and believes on the matter and what this is founded on. A statement of concern about increasing persecution of Christians is then followed by six calls for action. Because human dignity is anchored in scripture, the WEA affirms the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant historic declarations of the United Nations. Freedom to exercise any or no religion is regarded as indivisible, and is claimed for all and in collaboration with all who support religious freedom. The WEA is not shy to co-operate, and advocate the freedom of others without accepting the truth of what they believe. These affirmations close with a statement of particular solidarity on theological grounds with persecuted Christians. The calls to action are addressed to ever widening circles starting with the global church, moving via the media to governments and the United Nations. The church is called to intercession, particularly to join in the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, (which was inaugurated by the Religious Liberty Commission of the WEA), biblical teaching on persecution, advocacy, and working towards peace with all. The media is called to serious and unbiased reporting on religious persecution, governments which have protected religious freedom at home or abroad are applauded, the United Nations, governments and agencies are called to help stop the infringements of human rights and the UN Human Rights Council is particularly urged to protect the right to change one's religion.

Religious Liberty Commission

At the Assembly Godfrey Yogarajah from Sri Lanka was inaugurated as the new Executive Director of the Religious Liberty Commission. Until recently he served as the General Secretary of the National Christian Alliance of Sri Lanka, and simultaneously as the General Secretary of the Asian Evangelical Alliance, and presently also heads the Colombo Bureau of the International Institute for Religious Freedom. During a meeting of the Religious Liberty Commission on the two days preceding the assembly he presented his plans for that commission.

Another member of the Religious Liberty Commission, Prof. Dr Thomas Schirrmacher from Germany, was honoured with the International *Pro Fide* Award, awarded by the Finnish organisation

“Friends of the Martyrs”, for his ongoing international efforts on behalf of persecuted Christians and followers of other religions.²

Among the written reports by the WEA commissions to the General Assembly was one by the Religious Liberty Commission (RLC), signed by its chairman, John E Langlois, from Guernsey. The report noted “a significant increase of religious persecution across the world, particularly of evangelical Christians” in the six years since the last assembly. The RLC concentrates on work not being done by other organizations. Since the WEA represents a large proportion of evangelicals, it has the potential to speak on behalf of evangelical alliances before parliaments, governments and the press, which cannot be done by para-church agencies. Much work is done behind the scenes from the office of the executive director of the RLC, which co-ordinates calls for help with the various national RLCs. The three regular ‘products’ of the RLC are the co-ordination of the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP) and materials for it, the *Religious Liberty News and Analysis* by Elizabeth Kendal, and the *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin*, which are electronically distributed globally.³ The RLC does its work in co-operation with a number of affiliated and non-affiliated bodies: The International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) pursues academic research and publications, Advocates International maintains a global network of skilled lawyers, the First Step Forum is a small independent network of ambassadors, members of parliament and others who pursue private diplomatic initiatives, and the Religious Liberty Partnership gathers agencies working for the persecuted church.

Reports of regional evangelical alliances and global partners

The conference folders contained numerous reports, including those from the regional evangelical alliances, which link the national alliances of the various regions. Also included were reports by the 12 global partners of the WEA, who are ministering globally, and therefore are accorded their own category of membership.

² See the Noteworthy section of IIRF (2) 2009:1, available online: <http://tinyurl.com/57fsf5>.

³ www.ea.org.au. The *News and Analysis* ceased in March 2009. The *Prayer Bulletin* continues under the auspices of the Australian Evangelical Alliance.

The Asia Evangelical Alliance (AEA), representing the continent with 61% of the world's population and home to three of the largest and main non-Christian religious groups in the world, lists religious fundamentalism and persecution among the six major challenges they are facing. "Right winged political parties have emerged in many Asian nations, embedded in the dominant culture and religion. One's patriotism is determined by one's religious identity." The AEA responded by organizing a training conference on biblical theology of persecution and discipleship and by bringing together Asian Christian lawyers at the Advocates Asia Conference in 2007, focusing on the issues of justice and religious freedom.

The European Evangelical Alliance sees many of its members facing religious liberty struggles and is publishing *Position Papers*, e.g. on freedom of speech.⁴ It is also a founding member of the European Platform on Religious Intolerance and Discrimination (EPRID).

The WEA global partner Advocates International maintains a global network of Christian lawyers. Their global taskforce on religious freedom is promoted by Advocates Asia.⁵

Mission in the context of suffering, violence, persecution and martyrdom

The 11th Global Consultation of the Mission Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance had as one of its interrelated topics 'mission in the context of suffering, violence, persecution and martyrdom'. The other topics were 'contextualization of mission' and 'mission and spirituality'. The Consultation which is held every two to three years, gathered 250 mission and church leaders from over 50 nations "for mutual encouragement, fellowship and building of relationships, growth in the understanding of the missional enterprise around the globe, dealing with global issues and challenges, and planning the joint work and strategies, in order to become better equipped for the work."⁶ The general reflections of all participants and the specific missiological teams generated the core content for a new series of

⁴ www.europeanea.org/news.html.

⁵ www.advocatesinternational.org.

⁶ Available online: www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/mc/PRESS_RELEASE_b.pdf [Accessed: 30 November 2009].

three missiological books to be published during the next three years based on the work done by the Global Missiology Task Force. Since its Iguassu Consultation⁷, held in Brazil in 1999, there had been a call to pursue the issue in more detail. The Iguassu Declaration stated in one of its nine declarations:

Suffering, persecution and martyrdom are present realities for many Christians. We acknowledge that our obedience in mission involves suffering and recognize that the church is experiencing this. We affirm our privilege and responsibility to pray for those undergoing persecution. We are called to share in their pain, do what we can to relieve their sufferings, and work for human rights and religious freedom.⁸

One out of 14 commitments was dedicated to the cross and suffering:

As our Lord called us to take up our crosses, we remind the church of our Lord's teaching that suffering is a part of authentic Christian life. In an increasingly violent and unjust world with political and economic oppression, we commit to equip ourselves and others to suffer in missionary service and to serve the suffering church. We purpose to articulate a biblical theology of martyrdom.

This was never fully followed up at the Missions Commission consultations until Pattaya. At the Global Issues Summit in 2006, held in South Africa, Reg Reimer addressed 'persecution, advocacy and mission at the beginning of the 21st century' in the plenary session.⁹

Mission Commission plenary

The executive director of the Mission Commission, Bertil Ekström from Brazil, presented the three themes of the Consultation as reflected in the example of Jesus and particularly the passion of Christ. In the light of this, mission is to follow the path of the cross.

The cross shows us ... the way God's mission is carried out, many times in a context of suffering. Mission in the way of Jesus includes fulfilling God's purpose in a context of suffering, violence, persecution and martyrdom.

⁷ Available online: <http://tinyurl.com/igua1999> [Accessed: 30 November 2009].

⁸ Available online: www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/mc/igua_affirm.htm [Accessed: 30 November 2009].

⁹ Available online: www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/mc/mc_southafrica/resources/0605.doc [Accessed: 30 November 2009].

The programme was structured in such a way that panel discussions in the evening preceded the plenary speeches on the conference themes. Marvin Newell of CrossGlobal Link (formerly IFMA), who chaired the panel, reminded those present:

Suffering and persecution have always been the lot of the true church of Christ. The worldwide church of the 21st century is certainly not exempt from it, and is likely to face more hostility than in any previous century. It is estimated that 200 million evangelicals live in pockets of intense persecution. Believers need to be prepared to personalize a theology of suffering that will call them to stand true to their Lord in the face of growing opposition.

He pointed out that persecution of the worldwide church is universal, uneven and unabating. He used Matthew 10 to describe various levels of hostility towards witnesses of Christ: rejection, detention, violence, persecution, and martyrdom. In closing he highlighted a coincidence of challenges for the missional community: “The least reached live in the areas hardest to go to, and it needs sacrificial messengers. These are also the regions where the world religions are strongest.”

The four panellists represented various regions of the world. From South Central Asia it was reported that the cause for persecution of Christians by Muslims lay in the largely negative historic perception of Christianity and in the growth of the Christian church compared to a non-fulfilled self-perception of Islam as the solution to all of the world’s problems. This led to the attempt to counter defections from Islam by laws punishing apostasy. In a country in West Asia the media is portraying Christians and missionaries as the biggest threat to the nation. In a large African nation a ministry is taking care of the 100 widows of pastors who have been killed. A panellist appealed to equip church leaders in situations of massive violence, as they often did not know how to help people and were traumatised themselves. They needed help to learn to listen to the victims, and a theology of suffering. Another panellist found that workers from a Latin American country were very effective in helping to heal trauma in an Asian nation because of their human warmth and physical touch. But there was also concern about the wisdom of sending first generation missionaries, who had never experienced the situations of violence and persecution, into such areas. There was also criticism of the church being too focused on the maintenance of their own status quo in some situations where converts bore the brunt of

persecution. Or the view that a panellist held: “The church is more focused on removing pain from daily life, but God is focusing on how to remove evil through sacrifice.” Kees van der Wilden, the deputy director of the Mission Commission, was impressed by the striking appropriateness to these situations of the slogan of the preceding General Assembly which still decorated the platform: “One Lord, one body, one voice.” Belonging to one Lord, suffering alongside the part of the body that suffers, the church is called to speak with one voice on behalf of those persecuted for Christ.

A plenary speaker, giving a perspective from South East Asia, deplored the lack of a theology of suffering in mission. Popular theology, he said, focused too much on self and had succumbed to a consumer Christianity which only asked: *What do I get out of it?* “Our theology of suffering is confined to historical texts, and only concerns people far away.” He challenged the participants to prepare their churches for suffering and to rediscover the relevant New Testament heritage (Matt 8:20; 1 Pet 4:14; Phil 1:29). Alluding to current persecution in Orissa, India, he claimed: “One of the problems is the stone-throwing church. It throws the stones that have been thrown into the church back out. Inappropriate responses cause violence to spiral.” He encouraged his listeners to prepare themselves to deal with the practical areas of suffering, before sending workers into situations of persecution. In his own ministry they assured wives of local evangelists for example, that provision had been made for them and the education of their children if their husbands were killed. Asking whether all suffering was necessary, he distinguished between self-inflicted suffering and suffering for the sake of Christ. Christians should ask themselves whether in some instances they were causing their own suffering, e.g. when evangelising minors without their parent’s consent, ignoring social structures of the community, offending by confrontational preaching which ignored cultural communication patterns, or through a lack of contextualisation. The speaker described two different responses to suffering: Faith that endures and grows and faith that falters under the pressure of suffering. He appealed to the participants: “Do not fear suffering, but don’t invite it either!”

Another speaker presented a Christian perspective of the Arab world, which is united by the Islamic religion and the Arabic language. He divided the area into three different regions: North

Africa, the Middle East, and the Arab Peninsula. In the Middle East, where Christianity started and remained, Christians encounter problems when they preach publicly. In North Africa Christianity arrived in 700 AD but did not survive in some places because of disunity and infighting in the church, and because of a lack of cultural rootedness. In the Arab Peninsula the church had been represented from the first or second century, but it later disappeared. Part of the church's suffering in these regions comes about when a Muslim chooses to become a Christian or when Christians witness to Muslims. The speaker found it particularly hurtful to witness what happens to children. When a Christian from a Muslim background marries a partner from the same religious background, their children are still registered as Muslims, because legally conversion from Islam to Christianity is not possible. Thus the children are torn between two identities: in their families they are raised as Christians, while outside the family and church they are considered Muslim. When they themselves may want to marry one day they will again encounter the restrictions of Muslim family law. The speaker put major emphasis on the challenges a church in that context faces when it wants to partake in the Great Commission by sending out Christian workers. Raising awareness about mission work, sending, funding and member-care for workers and building good international partnerships are all very difficult tasks if this has to be done with the greatest discretion and confidentiality in order not to risk the lives of national believers. In the short term numerically the outcome of such efforts is not impressive, but the labour has been seen to bear fruit over the period of a generation. For this reason the decision by foreign agencies to invest funds and workers based on projected measurable outcomes, like in a business investment, was found to be detrimental. In such cases a growing discrepancy developed between the reality in the Arab World and much of the academic missiology that was being developed by the Western world. When the speaker presented images from a national prayer conference in Iraq to stress the importance of prayer during persecution, I was impressed to see an African brother encourage the local Christians.

Topical issue of the *Connections* journal

The groundwork for the consultation had been laid by two issues of the WEA Mission Commission journal *Connections* (2008) dedicated to the

consultation themes, with a third one to follow. Thus one 80-page-double-issue of the journal, which was made available to all the participants, contains an impressive array of articles on mission in contexts of suffering, violence, persecution and martyrdom.¹⁰ The insertion of violence in the usual triad of suffering, persecution and martyrdom, probably stems from the editors' focus on missionary experience and is also reflected in a book review of Keith Eitel's *Missions in contexts of violence* (2008). The journal covers missiological reflections, contemporary trigger events for persecution, global voices (40 writers from 27 nations) and a strong emphasis on best practice commitments. Tonica van der Meer, a Brazilian, contributes biblical reflections on ministry and suffering which emanate from her doctorate in missiology on 'understanding and supporting missionaries in contexts of suffering,' and Glenn Penner summarises 'a biblical theology of persecution and discipleship' from his book on the same topic. The reflections on trigger events largely focus on the Korean hostage incident in Afghanistan in 2007. They include remarkably self-critical voices from Korean missiologists. They emphasise the need for wisdom, research, qualitative growth, development of expertise, avoidance of massive public rallies in sensitive contexts, refocusing outcome expectations of short-term mission trips, and better care for missionaries from this younger sending nation which has the second largest protestant missionary contingent in the world. Sadly consultants on crisis management conclude that "the circumstances of the negotiations and the agreement leading to the release will increase the probability of future kidnappings of Christian missionaries and relief workers in Afghanistan and other venues" where Christian workers and Islamist terrorists coexist (:21-22). A plethora of voices and experience emanated in response to questions sent by the editors to national mission movements, mission agencies and sending churches concerning their policies and guidelines on the pre-field preparation of missionaries, contingency plans, policies on kidnapping and ransom, post-trauma care, missionary training and general member care. An additional question was: "Do you have a written summary statement giving a biblical theology of persecution or martyrdom?" A number of best practice documents from agencies are reproduced, such as model policy recommendations for crisis management or guidelines

¹⁰ Full text of journal available at www.weaconnections.com → back issues → July 2008.

focusing on crisis prevention. Very clearly this publication focuses on the issues encountered by mission practitioners.

Task force on mission in contexts of suffering, violence, persecution and martyrdom

Much of the consultation time was spent in task force and networking groups. Moderated by Bill Taylor and Reg Reimer between 10-15 people met to brainstorm on a new book of the Mission Commission in its *Globalization of Mission Series* on ministry in the context of suffering, violence, persecution and martyrdom (abbreviated SVPM). It is to be edited by Bill Taylor and Tonica van der Meer for publication in 2009. This missiological textbook will be designed to be translated into various languages and adapted for various contexts. Its unique contribution among the existing books on a number of its sub-themes is, that it will represent the voice of the missionary movement. It will primarily address the global mission community, that is, reflective practitioners such as leaders of missionary movements, networks, training centres, academics, sending churches, and missionaries in training and in ministry. Its purpose is to positively influence the being, thinking, doing and teaching of mission practitioners with regards to SVPM.

It will probably include some of the content of the above-mentioned topical *Connections* issue. While the final production of the compendium will be in the hands of the editors and depends on the availability of authors and already published material – it is interesting to note the issues that the brainstorming exercise has brought to light. Certainly solid biblical foundations must be laid for a theology of SVPM. Additional issues to be dealt with are the health and wealth teaching, as well as an eschatological perspective for SVPM. A survey on the role of SVPM in the history of mission will also need to address the question of how persecution and church growth relate to each other. This will probably be pursued in a number of case studies. Then an overview of the current situation of the Christian missionary enterprise in relation to SVPM, and a survey of the ‘engines of persecution’ will need to be produced, and hopefully we will be supplied with some instructive maps in that regard. The array of foundational contributions and overviews would not be complete without definitions of SVPM and a reflection on how they are inter-related. Some major topics that need to be addressed are: learning

from the persecuted church, equipping church leaders for SVPM, appropriate responses to persecution, instruments for missionary training re SVPM, engaging public opinion on SVPM, engaging Christian youth on the topic, ministry to the persecuted and their families, navigating national laws, risk and crisis management vs. readiness to suffer, member care for missionaries, the use of expressions of SVPM in the arts, contextualisation and SVPM, spirituality and SVPM. All these issues should be addressed with a view for practitioner application, including, and as appropriate, guidelines, statements of best practice, case studies and testimonies.

This article is certainly still incomplete and only an abbreviated summary of the discussion in which the author participated. However, it seems that we can anticipate an authoritative textbook and compendium on the issue, being of the same calibre as some earlier volumes in the series.

IIRF: Equipping the church through research

A player that could not be overlooked at both conferences was the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) of the World Evangelical Alliance, which is closely linked to the WEA Religious Liberty Commission. It is an academic research institute that equips the church to face issues of religious freedom and persecution, and is directed by Prof Dr Thomas Schirrmacher and the author of this article. Delegates engaged IIRF staff in numerous conversations, sharing their concern on legislation emerging in their countries affecting their religious freedom, asking for the publication of national incident reports on persecution, and equipping themselves and libraries with the materials provided by the Institute.

The General Assembly was the occasion for the launch of the *International Journal for Religious Freedom* which was distributed to all participants. A second item made available, particularly to seminaries, was the first volume of the *Religious Freedom Series*. The series is dedicated to the scholarly discourse on the issue of religious freedom in general and the persecution of Christians in particular. It is an interdisciplinary, international, peer reviewed, scholarly series, serving the practical interests of religious freedom. The first volume is entitled *Re-examining religious persecution – constructing a theological framework for understanding persecution* by Charles L

Tieszen. This innovative study examines the shortcomings of many modern studies devoted to religious persecution. Noting the gaps in current theological reflection, Tieszen offers a theological framework to properly understand religious persecution of Christians and for responding to it. Perhaps most importantly, a definition of persecution is put forth that seeks to incorporate necessary and often overlooked elements.

Finally the IIRF, at the request of the WEA general director, produced *The Wea Global Issues Serie*. The volumes are written for popular understanding and contain 100-150 pages. Five volumes were made available so far: The philosopher Thomas K Johnson wrote a Christian primer on human rights. The WEA human rights spokesperson, Thomas Schirmmacher, contributed a collection of essays entitled *May a Christian go to court* and his monograph *The persecution of Christians concerns us all*. WEA spokesperson on Islam, Christine Schirmmacher, provided her volume on *The Islamic view of major Christian teachings* and a collection of essays on *Islam and society*, containing further essays on, Sharia law, Jihad, and women in Islam.

The materials were received with great interest and are now freely available online to anyone interested at www.iirf.eu.

Looking ahead: Developing an evangelical theology of suffering, persecution and martyrdom for the global church in mission

The outcome of numerous discussions with key role players at both conferences was the emergence of a draft for a study process and consultation by experts on developing an evangelical theology of suffering, persecution and martyrdom for the global church in mission. The main sponsor of the consultation will be the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission in co-operation with some other commissions. The International Institute for Religious Freedom of the WEA will organise the consultation, which will take place in September 2009 in Germany. The purpose is to come to a common understanding among those who, in various contexts, have already written on the topic, and to a description of the differences of opinion. This will result in a statement, journal articles and a compendium.

The organisers give the following rationale for the consultation:

The prevalence of prosperity theologies in parts of the evangelical/pentecostal movements tends to ill equip the church for the suffering that accompanies its mission in the world. This at times leads to the neglect of solidarity with suffering parts of the body of Christ. For decades evangelical Christians in the Global South have called for 'a theology of the pathway of the cross', which deals in-depth with suffering, persecution and martyrdom. Different types of such theologies are found in other streams of Christianity such as the liberationist, Roman Catholic, Orthodox and various other traditions. Much can be learned from their insights and concerns. Similarly evangelicals at times hold different paradigms and positions on particular issues. Some global evangelical gatherings have touched on the topic and there have been some regional consultations. The Forum 2004 Issue Group 'The persecuted Church' and the 2008 WEA Mission Commission focus topic 'Mission in a context of violence of suffering, persecution and martyrdom' call for deeper theological reflection. In the preparations for Lausanne III in Cape Town 2010 the topic has been identified as one of the key challenges facing the global church. The proposed consultation has been welcomed by the Lausanne director as a preparation towards Cape Town 2010. Neither WEA Commissions nor the Lausanne Movement and its tracks, consultations or working groups have ever made a global attempt to systematically develop such a theology. A number of doctoral theses and books mainly from the global south have been written on the issue in recent decades which might reflect some of the deepest expert knowledge on the matter. But too often, they did not take notice of each other.

Four objectives are being pursued by the consultation: (i) Bringing the various evangelical theologies from different contexts of either suffering for Christ, persecution for Christ or Christian martyrdom into fuller dialogue. (ii) Scrutinising and building upon previous consultations and statements. (iii) Possibly interacting with theologies of other Christian traditions on the topic. (iv) Developing a synthesis of evangelical approaches to the topic.

This consultation draft is an example of the synergy created at international conferences.

Advocacy and readiness to suffer

In order to highlight the particular emphases of these conferences it might be helpful to contrast them with two other gatherings on related

topics in which the author participated in recent years. From the 2004 Forum of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, also held in Pattaya, emerged a Lausanne Occasional Paper on *The Persecuted Church*.¹¹ This was a working conference of many small groups, which produced short books each containing practical recommendations for local churches. These focussed on the one hand on listening to the voices of representatives of the persecuted church, describing various contexts of persecution, and on the other hand on giving recommendations for action and best practice to churches and agencies helping the persecuted church. Theological aspects were comparatively under-emphasised.

In 2007 the International Religious Liberty Association held its 6th World Congress with the topic 'Combating religious hatred through freedom to believe'. Mainly Christian but also some Muslim as well as secular speakers addressed the topic from various angles. The main purpose of the conference seems to have been to raise public awareness for the freedom to believe and to educate the participants on defending religious liberty in public policy in various contexts. The majority of the participants were Seventh-Day Adventists, a small protestant minority group, who consider themselves 'the canary in a coal mine' as their religious freedom is usually restricted earlier than that of other Christian groups. The congress issued a short statement and some of the presentations were published in the journal *Fides et Libertas*.¹²

By contrast the WEA General Assembly was a world gathering representing a large current of the Christian church. The delegates usually were general secretaries or chairpersons of national or regional evangelical alliances, and church leaders and directors of some large Christian agencies and networks operating internationally. Advocacy for the voiceless and the persecuted church is one of several burning issues on the agenda of this Christian world body. This issue has been important throughout the organisation's history and it will likely remain important because of the body's deep-rooted convictions. There was only one day set aside for the topic, but it had a major impact on the assembly, and resulted in a public declaration on religious freedom and solidarity with the persecuted church.

¹¹ Available online: www.lausanne.org/documents/2004forum/LOP32_IG3.pdf [Accessed: 30 November 2009].

¹² www.irla.org.

The Mission Commission Consultation was quite different, it was a gathering of reflective mission practitioners, network and agency leaders and trainers from among evangelical churches. Its perpetual focus is the global missional enterprise, with a variety of aspects which were previously dealt with at different conferences. The context of suffering, violence, persecution and martyrdom was for the first time a dominant theme. The question at the heart of this topic is how to carry out the missional task in those contexts, and what this means for strategy, training, theology, member care, contextualization, spirituality, etc. in mission. It is taken as a given that the task involves suffering, but some self-inflicted suffering could be avoided with more wisdom. The conference provided the participants with an opportunity to deliberate among themselves and their community of practice. The outcome is a textbook and compendium for mission in the said context. In contrast to the Lausanne 2004 Forum Working Group the focus was not on persecution, but on mission, and the interest was less in 'helping' the persecuted church, than in fulfilling the missional task together.

In both WEA gatherings the equal emphases of advocacy on the one hand and readiness to suffer for Christ on the other, were present. But clearly standing up for one's rights, solidarity with and advocacy for the persecuted church and adherents of other religions was emphasised at the General Assembly, while at the Mission Commission Consultation the willingness to suffer with Christ in God's mission was given even more prominence.

The Apostle Paul, who considered it a privilege to suffer for Christ and for the task of bringing the gospel to Jews and gentiles, while at the same time appealing to his rights as a Roman citizen, was viewed as a model for this two-fold approach. Paul and other biblical authors also provide the church with a theology of suffering, persecution and martyrdom in mission, which urgently needs to be spelled out anew for those faithful to God's mission today.

Resolution on religious freedom and solidarity with the persecuted church

World Evangelical Alliance *

Abstract

The World Evangelical Alliance General Assembly on 30 October 2008 affirmed human rights and religious freedom, explained its policy and theological rationale on the issue, voiced its concerns and appealed to those in a position to improve the situation. A narrative on the genesis of the resolution and an analysis of its contents can be found in the preceding report.

Keywords World Evangelical Alliance, General Assembly, resolution, religious freedom, religious persecution.

1. The members attending the 12th General Assembly of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) affirm its history of working towards religious freedom for all people. This was one of the motives for the founding of the Evangelical Alliance in 1846. We affirm the advocacy for persecuted Christians and adherents of other faiths towards those in government, exemplified by the first Evangelical Alliance delegations sent to the Turkish Sultan and the Russian Tsar in the 19th century, and as now expressed by the work of Religious Liberty Commission, its Goodwill Ambassador, and its International Institute for Religious Freedom.
2. The activities of the WEA in this regard are founded on Scripture which reveals that every human being is created in the image of God and thus has indelible dignity.
3. The WEA therefore affirms human rights as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on the occasion of its 60th anniversary.
4. The WEA affirms religious freedom to exercise any or no religion as defined by the relevant declarations of the United Nations. The right to religious freedom is indivisible and cannot be claimed for one particular group only to the exclusion of others.
5. The WEA therefore aims to work collaboratively with all who share its goals of supporting religious freedom, be it political

* www.worldevangelicals.org.

powers or representatives of other or no religions. The WEA affirms the intention of Christians to live together peacefully with adherents of other or no religions and to work together for the common good and reconciliation.

6. The WEA differentiates between advocating the rights of members of other or no religions and the truth of their beliefs. Advocating the freedom of others can be done without accepting the truth of what they believe.
7. The WEA takes seriously the command of Scripture to be on the side of the persecuted. When any part of the body of Christ suffers, we suffer with them, as we consider ourselves to be one part of the Christian community.
8. The WEA notes with great concern the increasing persecution of Christians across the world. We have heard first hand reports at our assembly of Christians being killed and churches being burned in India, of Christian minorities driven out of Iraq and numerous other examples of grave and violent persecution. We weep with our brothers and sisters and pray with and for them, that the Holy Spirit may comfort and strengthen them in their witness. Following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ we pray for the persecutors that God may forgive them.
9. The members attending this assembly therefore call upon all churches worldwide to regularly intercede in prayer for the persecuted church, especially in their Sunday services. We also invite them to join us in the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church and similar initiatives. We appeal to all churches to deepen and teach a biblical theology of persecution, to practise advocacy on behalf of the persecuted church and to work towards peace among the churches, as well as between Christians and adherents of other or no religions.
10. We appeal to the adherents of other or no religions to join hands with us in the effort to eliminate religious persecution and to restrain those within their communities committing discriminatory and violent acts.
11. We call upon the media to report on religious persecution worldwide. We appeal to them to treat this massive and widespread violation of human rights with the same seriousness as any other

human rights violations. We appeal to the media to beware of being abused for disinformation and defamation of religious minorities.

12. We thank all governments which have protected or improved religious freedom in their own countries or have used their influence to do so in other countries.
13. We call upon the United Nations, other international agencies and national governments to do all within their power to stop such brutal infringements of fundamental human rights in contravention of the International Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments.
14. We especially urge the United Nations and the UN Human Rights Council to stand against any attempt to lower or dilute the right to change one's religion as affirmed in article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Resolved by the delegates at the WEA General Assembly at Pattaya, Thailand, on 30th October 2008.

Interview with Johan Candelin

The following is an edited version of an interview conducted on 28 October 2008 at the World Evangelical Alliance General Assembly in Pattaya, Thailand, on the occasion of Johan Candelin's retirement after twelve years as Executive Director of the WEA Religious Liberty Commission.

Q How do you feel after your retirement?

JC I am satisfied I was able to 'do it'. However, there comes a point in life where one has to re-evaluate one's situation, asking oneself, is there still some new ministry one would love to do, some enthusiasm for going towards a horizon one hasn't seen before. That is my situation. Also, when you receive so much bad news about incidents of persecution everyday day for so many years, the risk arises that you stop reacting in the way you should, and I was in that situation.

Q What sparked your original interest in Religious Liberty?

JC From my home in Finland it was about a four hours drive to the Soviet, now Russian, border. There Religious Liberty was a burning topic with Christians being tortured, killed, and put in prison. Hearing about this came as a shock, a good shock.

Q Have you been able to achieve what you set out to do as Executive Director of the Religious Liberty Commission?

JC One of the goals I had set myself was to build up the Religious Liberty Commission so that it would represent Christians from different parts of the world. That has happened. There are areas like Latin America that are not represented on the Commission.

However there are very little religious liberty issues in Latin America, except for Columbia and a few additional places, but compared to other parts of the world religious liberty is not a big issue on that continent. Two other goals we achieved was to find political advisors for the Commission, and to be afforded a position at the United Nations.

* Johan Candelin was born and raised in Finland. In 1966 he was ordained as a Lutheran minister. He went on to pastor congregations in France, and Sweden Helsinki, before being appointed Senior Pastor in the church from which his father had retired. In 1982 he started the organization Friends of the Martyr Church, of which he is still the Chairman. From 1986 he headed a charismatic renewal in the Finnish church. Then followed his involvement with the Evangelical Alliance and the First Step Forum, it's been interesting. His interests include revival, spiritual renewal, foreign policy and stand up comedy. E-mail: candelin@kolumbus.fi.

In addition we set out to inform the world about religious liberty violations. Today people from different regions, inform the world about what is happening.

Q Did you observe any trends in religious persecution over the last twelve years?

JC Persecution develops in three phases. It starts with disinformation in the media – Christians are written about as bad people, enemies of the state, people led by foreign interest and people who disturb the national harmony. This is followed by discrimination, – because they are bad people they cannot be teachers, cannot serve in the military and cannot occupy political posts. From there it develops into persecution, prison, torture and so on. This mechanism applied then and now. However, two new developments have taken place. Firstly, today religion is at the very epicentre of foreign policy and foreign relations. Unlike during the Cold War today most conflicts are no longer between states but within states. This complicates matters, because when conflicts arise between states, it is relatively easy for the United Nations to intervene. If conflict occurs inside a nation and the state insists on its sovereignty, it becomes difficult for international pressure to be exerted successfully.

In addition, the world changed on September 11, 2001. The Muslim community sees the war in Iraq as a war on Islam. Muslims have come to believe that Islam is losing ground, and that every Muslim must now stand up and fight for Islam to conquer the world as the prophet Mohammed has promised. In the process the gap between the Muslim world and the West has become larger and deeper.

Q Have you noticed changes in the church's awareness and response to Religious Liberty issues?

JC Firstly, compared to even five years ago there is a greater understanding today in churches worldwide of the existence of the persecuted church. That is a positive development. Most churches, however, say that as long as our denomination is not under attack, it's not our problem. This view represents a misunderstanding of the theology of the kingdom of God. Secondly, it's not only Religious Liberty that is in the spotlight today. There is also poverty, hunger, refugee and environmental problems. By way of illustration, I was invited to share information on the persecuted church in a church in the United States. After the service I realised that I was not the only one representing a good cause. There were 14 good reasons to help different projects presented

during the same event. We are showered with good projects today, and there exists a clear risk that people will get tired of everything.

Q Have you observed any other important aspects of the church's response to persecution?

JC At present a church wanting to help the persecuted church usually does this by donating money to one organization, and that is a good thing, and I bless these organizations. However, it would be better if a local church could adopt a persecuted local church directly, and send a delegation to this church to meet them there and to invite them for a return visit.

Q How good is the co-operation between the various religious liberty organisations?

JC It has been a shame that for so many years these organizations did not work together. It's of course all about fund raising and building one's own ministry. Praise God that during the last three years we have seen a clear change in this regard.

Q How does the Catholic Church fit into the Religious Liberty movement?

JC This question is related to the bigger question of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Alliance. In this regard the suffering church might be the easiest way to work together with the Catholic Church. The present Pope and the Pope before have spoken out very clearly on matters of Religious Liberty, much more clearly than many Protestant church leaders in the West, who try to be politically correct. We should look at future opportunities to work together with the Catholic Church in the field of Human Rights and Religious Freedom issues, remembering that they have a worldwide diplomatic network at their disposal. The problem here, however, is the question of conversion. It is no coincidence that it is the Evangelical Christians who are being persecuted, because in most cases the Catholic Church lives a quiet spiritual life, while Evangelical Churches often lead a wild, noisy life, planting new churches in villages where there has never been a Christian gospel presence before. It is logical that this is where the Church will be attacked. The Catholic Church doesn't always understand why we create these problems for ourselves. However we do relate to Jesus who said that we should go out and make disciples of all people. Even if the cost is very high this is our main mission, and we must be faithful to that mission.

- Q** Some Religious Liberty organizations prefer to use assertiveness, others use diplomacy as their main approach. What is your opinion?
- JC** I think both approaches are needed. If you use purely kind diplomacy many nations will not take note. If you only bash doors down or shout in the streets you will not achieve much either. I have come to the conclusion that we should thank God for all the different ministries. As with the spiritual gifts, that are all different, the various organisations need to be brought together, affirming that we are all different and work in different ways.
- Q** What were some high points and low points in your ministry during the past twelve years?
- JC** On the downside, we are so limited. There are more than 60 nations where there is no full Religious Liberty. If they all asked for support it would simply be impossible to help them all. On the upside, one of the highlights was when we were offered a position at the United Nations and were able to make our voice heard there. Also, meeting very interesting people such as Benazir Bhutto, the present Pope and the Pope before, and many other very interesting people.
- Q** Finally, what are your plans for the future?
- JC** My first problem with the Evangelical world, of which I am a part, is that it is very divided. More than 160 small groups claim to have the full truth. The second problem is that we are known to be reactive instead of proactive in a time of great possibilities for pro-activity. Thirdly, we do not always consider people outside the Evangelical circles as true followers of Jesus Christ. This is not only a mistake, it is a sin. My dream has been to build a network that would be proactive and would unite people. This is why I started the First Step Forum in 2002. Now I'm joining the organisation on a full time basis, because the missions and the possibilities open to us are so important that I have to do this. The forum unites members of parliament, ambassadors, business people, media experts and legal experts all working together to be proactive, and wanting to build bridges. We have been working with the governments of Turkey, Syria, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Morocco, Algeria and with very interesting projects around the world. I am very excited to be able to concentrate on that venture now, and to hand over the Religious Liberty Commission to my successor. I'm sure they will do much better in the future than they have done so far, and no one will be happier about that than me.

Thank you for the interview.

Christians still second-class citizens under Turkish secularism: Decades of experience of a Turkish Christian leader

Behnan Konutgan*

Abstract

As the Turkish government seeks entrance into the European Union, human rights, including religious freedom will be a key issue. The author, a Turkish Christian and Church leader for over 3 decades, after touching briefly on the past history of Christianity in Turkey, provides a first-hand glimpse into the present situation of believers in that Muslim country. He explores several arenas of persecution, discusses various causes and relates some of his first-hand experiences, evaluations and concerns about his home country.

Keywords Turkey - history of the church, Christian-Muslim relations, Islamic nationalism, religious freedom, discrimination against Christians.

The Turkish church and Islam, a historic contextualisation

When one speaks of the 'Holy Land' one usually thinks of Israel or Palestine, but we know that many of the events in the Bible took place in Anatolia, modern day Turkey. The events of Noah at Mt. Ararat and Abraham in Haran, and the Tigris and Euphrates rivers are all located in Anatolia. Many of the most important New Testament events took place there. St. Paul was born in Tarsus, his three missionary journeys took place mainly in Anatolia and the seven churches of Revelation are all situated in Western Turkey. Christianity grew and spread in these lands and the first seven ecumenical councils were held in Anatolia. In many ways we can call Anatolia the 'forgotten' Holy Land.

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The Selchuk Turks first arrived in Anatolia in 1071. Upon arrival they came across many Christians whose civilisations stretched back to pre-Christian eras for thousands of years. In the east were Georgians and Armenians, in the south-east were Assyrian Nestorians and Jacobites, and Anatolia was part of the Byzantine Orthodox Empire. These Christians had built churches, monasteries and seminaries throughout the land and spread the Gospel everywhere they went. But with the coming of the Turks to Anatolia these people were soon forced to convert to Islam and assimilate Turkish culture.

In the 1300s, from amongst the Selchuk clans arose the powerful Ottoman Empire. The new leader of the Turks was Osman, a Turkmen from Bursa in Western Anatolia who soon built an empire that carried his name. In a way, his empire was a continuation of the Great Selchuk Empire and was established on former Byzantine land. The Ottomans prided themselves in their Turkishness. From their establishment in 1299 until their demise in 1922 the Ottomans were the keepers of the Islamic religion. The people were governed by the laws of the 'Sharia', the Koranic law. Non-Muslim people i.e. Jews and Christians were considered second-class citizens according to the law and were called 'dhimi' (Yilmaz 1996:28-38). They were expected to pay tribute and taxes to their Muslim overlords.

Christians were also called 'gavur' (infidel). This word describes someone who is an outsider who does not do good and is ungrateful. In the Koran and Arab poetry, 'gavur' refers to those who have "forgotten the goodness done to them" (Koran 26:19). That is why Christians who lived in Muslim lands were always despised, ostracised and hated.

In Muslim society the 'dhimi' (Christians) were not allowed to marry Muslims, and their word was never accepted against that of a Muslim. If a Muslim man murdered a 'dhimi' he would not be put to death (Bozkurt 1989:8). In Muslim society these 'dhimi' were considered evil and strange (Bozkurt 1989:42-50). The 'dhimi' were not allowed to wear the same clothes as Muslims, could not give the greeting of 'peace' to a Muslim without having been greeted first, and were not allowed to build houses that rose higher than Muslim houses (Ye'or 1996:153-157). Christians, because they were always looked upon as ungrateful and treacherous, were not trusted with weapons and were not allowed to ride horses (Ortaylı 1994).

One of the greatest milestones in the history of the Ottoman law was attained with the proclamation of ‘Tanzimat’, the reorganisation of the Ottoman empire, which entailed a better status for non-Muslims (Bozkurt 1988:279). One of the characteristics of the ‘Tanzimat’ era (1839-1876) was that for the first time the legal rules imposed by Islamic law for non-Muslims living in a Muslim land, were completely revised giving them the status of ‘citizenship’ (Bozkurt 1994:280-285). It should be noted, however, that concepts and principles of modern law were first introduced into Ottoman law during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839) (Bozkurt 1994:280). With the reforms brought about by the ‘Tanzimat’ the Christian community was finally able to take a short breath, but the Muslim community saw these reforms as a betrayal to Islam. Many cities across the Empire held strong demonstrations against these reforms and the demonstrators proclaimed that the new laws were against the Koranic law. Thus, the laws had changed without changing the mind-set of the people.

In 1856, once again to please Europe, the Ottomans passed new laws (Islahat) that granted new freedom for non-Muslims. With the edict of ‘Islahat’ issued in 1856 equality between Muslim and non-Muslim subjects was declared and the institution of ‘dhimi’ which had been practiced for centuries, was abolished. Non-Muslims would no longer be exempt from military service and they would be accorded the rights to enter public service and to bear witness against Muslims (Bozkurt 1994:285).

Despite all these reforms, the Islamic law of ‘Sheriat’ continued to exist. A handful of men, led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk a former Ottoman army officer, abolished the Ottoman Empire and declared a republic in 1923. Their aim was to create a modern state under the banner of ‘Turkishness’. They proclaimed laws based on democracy and secularism, but these were never truly put into practice. During the era of the republic (1923-today), Christians were still considered second-class citizens, had no right to build churches, nor educate their clergy in seminaries. Even though the laws didn’t forbid this and were supposed to secure constitutionally guaranteed freedom, Christian activities, evangelism, and even public worship were hindered by an unchanged Muslim society.

From its beginnings, the Republic of Turkey has represented a secular democratic experiment in a Muslim country. However, Turkish-style secularism is not the same as its Western counterpart. Secularism in Turkey does not mean a complete separation of religion and state: the state openly controls religion (Allman 1999).

Discrimination against Christians in modern day Turkey

Islamic nationalism

Nationalism has always been strong in Turkey. Nationalist discourse seems to define a Turk as a Sunni Muslim Turkish nationalist. Nationalists see themselves as called to defend Turkey against ‘threats’ from ‘others’ who are frequently Turks, yet who do not fit the nationalist stereotype. To be a Turk, means to be a Muslim. Other religions are not accepted and tolerated.

As Christians we do not have any problem with Turkish law nor with the state. After all in Romans 13:1-3 we are required to submit to the governing authorities. And we should do this with a glad heart. It is easy to issue a new law, and abolish another, but it takes many long years to change the mentality of the people.¹ The Koran teaches that a Muslim should “kill the infidel whenever you come upon them” (Sura 2:191).

I was working as a teacher in Kayseri, one of the largest cities in Turkey, in a secular state high school. The head of education of the

¹ For expressions of this mentality cf. Pikkert: “... to give us an idea of Muslim critiques of Christian teaching and some of the common negative attitudes to Christian teachings we turn to the Turkish writer and personal friend, İsa Karataş’ *Gerçekleri Sapıranlar* (1997) (Truth Twisters) and Ağacı Yaşken *Eğdiler* (2000) (Bent Saplings). The first book traces Turkish Muslim perceptions, opinions, and teachings about Christianity in the often polemical press, as well as those of such popular Muslim writers as Edip Yüksel, Abulrahman Dilipak, Fethullah Gülen, and Ali Bulaç. Their works indicate a sense of fear, of being under threat. More important is Karataş’ second book. It looks at the often-fanciful teachings about Christianity in official textbooks published by Turkey’s Ministry of Education for use in Turkish grade- and high schools in the modern period. As such, it reflects the opinions, attitudes and prejudices with which virtually every Turkish citizen approaches Christianity” (Pikkert 2006:36).

district visited the high school. He was speaking to all the teachers. In almost every sentence he would say: “praise God, we are Turkish and Muslim.” I was upset and raised my hand, and said: “I’m a Turkish citizen, but I’m not a Muslim.” He was angry, stopped the meeting and left. The next day I was forced to resign.

A report submitted by the Turkish Alliance of Protestant Churches to the parliament’s Human Rights Commission on the state of religious minorities in Turkey alleges that non-Muslim groups in Turkey have been made targets for attacks. Part of the report reads as follows:

Despite the fact that freedom of belief is protected by the Constitution, the last decade has witnessed the development of campaigns aimed at denouncing, slandering and provoking non-Muslim groups. ... Disinformation regarding non-Muslim groups has helped make these groups a target ... the Protestant community in Turkey faces threats both to their lives and to their belongings.²

The report further detailed specific incidents of violence, discrimination and human rights violations against non-Muslim groups in 2007.

The role of the media

Disinformation about Christianity is wide-spread in Turkey in both national and local media. Time and time again, whether written or televised, well-known Islamic seminarians and politicians tell lies about Christianity, the Bible and Christian activities. This is what Pastor Zekai Tanyar, the former chairman of the Inter-church Legal Committee has written in a report about the media:

The media attacks continue with the aim to slander Christians and churches in the eyes of the public, to give the public the impression that any such religious activity is bad and illegal and, in a number of cases, incite people to take action against the churches and Christians. The latter has been the ugliest and has sadly resulted in a number of cases where church premises have been attacked, some individuals have faced verbal and physical attacks, derisory visits to their homes or neighbours

² Today’s Zaman 19 January 2008. Turkey’s Protestant churches complain they are being targeted. Available online: <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=132018>. Accessed: 1 November 2008. The original three-page report is entitled: Human Rights Violations Faced by the Protestant Community in Turkey During 2007.

by officials or those pretending to be, loss of jobs ... (Jubilee Campaign 2008:25-29).

The lawyer of the Turkish Kurtuluş (Salvation) Protestant churches, Orhan Kemal Cengiz, told Bianet³, a respected news agency, soon after the Malatya murders that although “missionary activity” is not a crime in Turkey, the politicians and the media have by constant repetition and reiteration invented such a crime. Individuals then decided to punish this crime.”

This slander causes us more pain than physical persecution. The Bible tells us in 2 Tim 3:12 that “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” We go through this process daily.

Harassment of the church

In the Republic of Turkey it is almost impossible to build a church. Since this is a problem, Christians in various cities rent places for worship. Local authorities make it their business to cause problems and take steps to have even these meeting places closed down. The neighbours of the rented places are uncomfortable and often harass the church and sometimes even do damage to the buildings. Church windows are broken and some churches have even been attacked with ‘Molotov cocktails’. In Istanbul one landlord was threatened by extreme nationalists and told to expel the Christians from his property, which he did. In the Black Sea town of Samsun, the pastor of a Protestant church has been constantly harassed by the community and local media. Once there was an attempt to kidnap his seven-year-old son. Another time they broke all the windows of the church and defaced its church sign. In another incident, one night two men arrived at the pastor’s home at midnight, claimed they were policemen and ordered him to accompany them to a deserted area. There they told him that they would hurt his family if he didn’t revert to Islam.

In another incident the Pastor in Samsun, Turkey, had been falsely charged with three serious crimes: insulting the prophet of Islam, Mohammed, insulting the police, and performing a marriage ceremony in the church (Compass Direct 2006). The pastor denied all three charges. Most Christians come across these kinds of problems daily.

³ www.bianet.org.

For decades now, ever since the establishment of the Republic, a hostile attitude of Turkish government towards non-Muslim communities has led to tight control over the boards which run the 'community foundations',⁴ a de facto ban on any maintenance or repair of the properties and to the taking away of much of the property under various pretexts. The building of the Halki Seminary, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchy's world-renowned theological college until it was forced to close by the government in 1971, also remains in the hands of a community foundation (Oehring 2008).

Anti-Christian bias in educational institutions

Christian children and their parents suffer constantly. If they are openly known to be Christians, they are rejected by their peers and often treated differently by their teachers. I have had personal experience with such problems. When the United States bombed Iraq, the following day my children were accused by their classmates of murdering their Muslim brothers. Although the children are not required to attend religion lessons at school, our children were forced to stay in the class. One day, during the lesson when the subject of the lesson was heaven and hell, the teacher asked the class where my son would go after death. The class responded by suggesting that he would go to hell. Situations like these affect our children negatively. One day a pastor in Ankara appeared on a television program to defend Christianity. The next day the children at school threatened his two daughters and frightened them. Hundreds of these kinds of incidents take place all over Turkey each year. These Muslim children, like their parents, are intolerant of anyone who is different from them.

A young teacher said in the class that there was no Christmas, that it was a lie. She said Christians were wrong. My son was sitting in the class looking at the teacher. He came home unhappy and told us what the teacher had told the students. Many teachers who teach in secular state schools are of the same mind. Without bothering to read the New Testament they speak as if they know everything about Christianity. There is a thick and high wall of prejudice against Christianity here in Turkey. Any child who goes to school is taught lies about Christianity and Christians. In the schools in Turkey the students are being taught that Christians believe in three Gods, that

⁴ Greek Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox foundation property.

Jesus was not crucified and that the Bible has been changed by the priests.

Evangelistic activities a 'threat' to Turkish unity

Even though evangelising is not formally prohibited, evangelical Christians in Turkey have been imprisoned because they partake in Christian activities and evangelise in the streets. Eight American citizens were arrested in March 1998 for having distributed copies of the New Testament in the streets of Eskişehir.⁵

Missionary activities are also on the agenda of the National Security Council, which is chaired by the President of the Republic and also comprises the Chief of the General Staff, the commanders of all branches of the Turkish Armed Forces and several government ministers. In a February 2005 evaluation of current and future challenges to Turkish security, the National Security Council drew attention to “a need [to institute] social activities that will prevent the spreading of organizations and ideologies that will have an impact on Turkey’s unity”. It was suggested that “abusive missionary activities should not be permitted” (Ceylan 2007).

I have had personal experiences in this regard. Starting from the 1970s, various correspondence courses have been offered by Christians to answer any questions people may have about Christianity. These activities were not illegal. From time to time I would take my share in answering the letters received. One day, when I was mailing 14 letters, a man approached me and identified himself as a policeman. He took me to a small room in the post office, and opened one of the letters. When he saw words like ‘Jesus’ and ‘Bible’ he called the policeman in charge of terror prevention. He said that he had caught a terrorist and asked them to come and arrest me. I spent the next three weeks four stories under ground in a dark room. It was a military prison. Every night three to four guards would come and beat me. Because Turkey was under martial law at that time, I was taken to a military court. When I was brought before the public prosecutor he asked me if I was trying to overthrow the government and set-up a Christian state. The Lord gave me the wisdom to explain the whole Gospel in short, emphasising that the Kingdom of Heaven that Jesus

⁵ Today's Zaman, 19 January 2008. Available online. <http://www.todayszaman.com>.

was building was not of this world, and as a Christian it was my duty to obey and be faithful to the laws of my country. When I finished, the public prosecutor looked at me and said: “Friend, what you are doing is not against the law, and I have no ground to punish you. But please be careful, because our policemen are ignorant, and they will wear you out” (Cf. U.S. Department of State 2007).

In the early 1990s two young Christians who had converted from Islam were celebrating their wedding in a small Protestant Church in Ankara. Suddenly the police broke up the celebration and took everyone present into custody for three days. They were later released without charges.⁶

From 2006-2007, the Turkish church and foreign Christians working in Turkey went through very difficult years.⁷ It began with the murder of Father Andreas Santoro, a Catholic priest serving in Trabzon on the Black Sea.⁸ Not much later, an Armenian journalist, Hrant Dink, was shot down in front of his office in downtown Istanbul.⁹ Lastly in April of 2007 three young Christians were brutally murdered at a Christian publishing house in Malatya by five young local Muslim men.¹⁰ What could cause such young men to defy the law and humanity by committing such a crime? What could encourage

⁶ The author was an eyewitness to this event.

⁷ Pikkert (2006:225) describes the build-up to this period as follows: “During the winter of 2004-05 maligning Christianity and Christian missions was raised to a feverish pitch in Turkey. One newspaper, *Üsküdar Gazetesi*, not only published a series of ‘exposes’ maligning Christianity, it also distributed free of charge over 500,000 copies of a particularly savage book, *Dikkat Misyoner Geliyor* (2004) (Beware, the Missionary is Coming) from a roving bus with the book’s title emblazoned on the side. Although the Turkish Ministry of Education books don’t mention Christian missions, the popular press regularly depicts modern missionaries as nothing but harbingers of Western cultural and political hegemony, agents of secularization serving Western political interests. Missions is “frequently characterized in Muslim discourse in precisely the same terms as colonialism: as oppressive, exploitative, unscrupulous as to methodology, ruthless, arrogant, immoral, and destructive of indigenous cultures” (Zebiri 2000:30).

⁸ *Milliyet Gazetesi* 05 February 2006; Available online: www.milliyet.com.tr/2006/02/06/son [Accessed 1 November 2008]; Jubilee Campaign 2008.

⁹ *Milliyet Gazetesi* 19 January 2007; Available online: www.arama.hurriyet.com.tr [Accessed 1 November 2008].

¹⁰ *Hurriyet Gazetesi* 19 April 2007; Available online: www.radikal.com.tr/index [Accessed 1 November 2008].

them to stand up in front of the world and proclaim that they had done it for the sake of God and country? There must be something in their beliefs that convinced them that these Christians were dangerous to Turkey. How different these men are from the wives of the victims who openly declared to the media that they forgave those who had killed their husbands!¹¹

One day two Turkish Christians who were working for a Christian organisation received a call from Silivri, a town 60 kilometres from Istanbul. The man who called asked these two Christians to meet with him and to tell him about Christ and Christianity. When the two Christians arrived at the appointed place, they saw two youths under the age of 18. The two Christians, knowing that it is forbidden to preach the Christian Gospel to minors, told the boys that they would not talk with them about Christianity. While talking with the boys a gendarme came, and arrested the two Christians. They were accused of spreading Christianity by illegal methods. The two Turkish Christians went on trial for allegedly insulting Turkishness and Islam.¹²

Bible distribution viewed as propaganda

In the biography of Lyman MacCallum, former American Bible Society director in Istanbul, Padwick, referring to the early era of the Republic, said about the Bible colporteurs that they, “meet [sic] with police interference, for, though the sale of the Bible is not illegal in the Turkish Republic, there may still be some among the less educated officials who regard this as a dangerous form of propaganda” (Padwick 1958:35).

Between the years 1981-2007, during my 26 years of work at the Turkish Bible Society, I encountered the same kinds of problems with the mentality of the people and the police. One day in 1984, while working at the Bible Society shop, located on the busiest street in Istanbul, a middle-aged man came in and asked me questions about the Bible. When I answered him, I could see that he didn't listen. Then I offered him a New Testament. He said he had no money. I offered it to him free of charge. He accepted a copy and left. On the same day this man returned with two policemen. I was accused of practising

¹¹ ATV 19 April 2007 aksam haberler; Milliyet 19 April 2007.

¹² This trial at the court in Silivri is still continuing.

illegal Christian propaganda and was put into jail for two weeks. When the case came before the judge, he reviewed my papers and became angry with the police because they had had no legal grounds to arrest me. I was set free with no charges against me. This sort of confrontation happens often, because the local police still believe that evangelism and Christian activities are against the law.

I was denied a passport between 1985-1990, and was considered 'unfit' to represent my country. When I secretly investigated my file through insiders, I was not surprised to see that the grounds for refusal were based on my Christian activities. When I learned this, I filed a case against the Ministry of the Interior. Since Christian evangelism and distributing Bibles is not illegal, the attorney for the Ministry of the Interior refused to give grounds for their refusal to issue me with a passport and the case was thrown out of court. Two months later I was able to get my passport.

Christian response

These events and the way that we are so misunderstood fill our hearts with pain. Despite all these negative situations we feel and still have great hope that our merciful God will bless the Turkish people, and give us, the Turkish Christians, more grace to love and bless them.

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Iran: Suppression of religious freedom and persecution of religious minorities

Thomas Schirmmacher*

Abstract

The article explores the situation of non-Shiite Muslims, non-Christian religions like Baha'i, and the different Christian confessions in Iran. It particularly examines their legal situation, asks for the ideological position of the Iranian leadership concerning other religions and then describes the actual problems, as the government rarely uses legal means against other religions, but uses allegations of espionage against them.

Keywords Iran, Shia, Sunni, Baha'i, Protestants, Evangelicals.

1. The Iranian revolution

Shah Reza Pahlavi maintained progressive economic policies while relying heavily on the West. Unpopular because of his use of repressive measures and his secret service, he was subsequently deposed of by the Shiite Islamic revolution. In 1979 the Islamic Republic was proclaimed. Ever since the Islamic clergy, as guardians of the revolution, maintain authority over the politicians, who, while mostly democratically elected, are hand-picked by the religious guardians. Consequently, in spite of its democratic structures, Iran remains a theocratic police state which ignores human rights, in particular those of minorities, non-Muslims and women.

Year after year, the classical reference works which categorize countries according to their religious freedom¹ and the persecution of

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¹ Eg. Boyle & Sheen 1997; Marshall 2000; Marshall 2008; Moreno 1996; International Coalition for Religious Freedom; US State Department 2008 (the

Christians (Shea 1997; Marshall 1997), as well as the annual reports of human rights organizations, the US State Department Human Rights Report,² and the US State Department Religious Freedom Report,³ have been rating Iran among the states where religious freedom is obviously non-existent and where even adherents of the state religion who hold a divergent doctrine are brutally persecuted.

Of the 70 million inhabitants of Iran, 95.6% are Muslims, 2.8% Zoroastrians, 0.7% Baha'i, 0.5% Christians (0.3% Orthodox), 0.5% non-religious and 0.1% Hindus.⁴ Shiite Islam is the state religion and 93% of the inhabitants adhere to it. Owing to the constant emigration of members of religious minorities, the figures for the religious minorities could, however, in the meantime be considerably lower.⁵

The Iranian revolution which has its origins in the long ideological history of the Iranian Shia (see Arjomand 1984; Ansari 2002), aimed at subjecting all spheres of society and each individual citizen to the will of the religious leaders – if necessary by means of control, threat and violence (cf. Akhavi 1987). Not even the political government itself is exempt from this. There is a broad consensus among scholarly researchers globally,⁶ including Islamic authors, that this has remained in force unaltered to date. This policy was and is considered to be a model for other parts of the world and has encouraged the spread of violence against dissenters and the suppression of religious freedom worldwide (Esposito 1990; Menashri 1990). This strategy is still maintained despite the fact that even insiders have to admit that the dream of a society better than that of the Shah era, a dream to which Ayatollah Khomeini owed much of his support, has long been shattered, particularly since the poor find

annual reports are very substantial on Iran); Aid to the Church in Need 2008.

² See the three reports quoted below on the human rights situation in Iran.

³ See the six reports quoted below on religious freedom in Iran.

⁴ According to Barrett 2001:379 who uses mainly official figures. The current updates of the work on the Internet do not give any divergent figures.

⁵ This is the assumption of eg. Johnstone 2005:352-355 based on intensive research by locals. He estimates: 99% Muslims, 0.5% Baha'i, 0.33% Christians (0.18% Orthodox), 0.5% non-religious, 0.1% Hindus, but he seems to subsume Zoroastrians with Muslims. The current updates of the work available at www.operationworld.org do not give any divergent figures. More details on the distribution of Christians below.

⁶ See the recent publications of Keil 2006; Grimond 2003; Kar 2005; Khameni 2002; Montazam 2002; Hooglund 2002; Menashri 2001; Nikpey 2001.

themselves in a worse situation than before and the image of Islam has suffered among the population.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is the Supreme Guardian of the Islamic Revolution. He is the de facto Chief of State and, as many may not know, also the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces⁷ and all armed units. Equally, the office of the President of Parliament and almost all of the top government offices are held by Islamic clerics who, while often regarded as liberal by Western observers owing to their often only slight deviations from the views of the Council of Guardians, do not in the slightest doubt the Islamic revolution and the necessity of maintaining a purely Islamic state.⁸

The 83 religious leaders elect the 'Supreme Guardian of the Revolution' who supervises all political proceedings. All laws and actions voted on by Parliament (called 'Majles' or 'Majlis') are scrutinized and approved by the so-called 'Council of Guardians' which consists of six religious leaders appointed by the Ayatollah and six Islamic jurists who are proposed by the Supreme Judge and elected by Parliament. Up until the nomination of the current President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Council of Guardians has rejected almost all laws proposed by Parliament, and even under this 'hardliner' this is happening repeatedly. All religious activities are meticulously supervised by the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance and the dreaded 'Minister of Intelligence and Security' (MOIS).

There is no prospect of improvement. For example, in 1998 the Iranian Parliament passed a law which prohibits any kind of medical care or treatment of patients by members of the opposite sex.⁹ (However, in reality many Iranians, especially in Teheran, are not observing such laws.) When the Parliament planned to raise the minimum age of marriage from 9 to 15 years in October 2000, the Council of Guardians refused to implement the suggestion. In addition, they still consider the so-called temporary marriage, known only in Shiite Islam, acceptable. Such a marriage can be entered into

⁷ Evidence in U.S. Department of State 1995:1076. An overview of the various constitutional organs in Iran and their interrelatedness is given by Keil 2006:25-32, who also gives an excellent portrayal of the divergent streams among Islamic clerics.

⁸ Evidence e.g. in Schirazi 2005; Coiplet 2001; Grimond 2003.

⁹ U.S. Department of State 2001:4; on further laws pertaining to marriage and sexuality see the detailed list in Kar 2005:57.

for a duration of at least 60 minutes and with several women simultaneously and leaves women at the mercy of de facto prostitution.¹⁰

2. Human rights in general¹¹

The lack of religious freedom in Iran is only one aspect of the wide range of human rights violations¹² which do not occur only in secret but are endorsed by official ideology¹³ and not only by the religious leaders but even government agencies, even though the latter would prefer to see some moderation for their own benefit. In the Iranian judicial system, one and the same person fills the role of judge and state attorney. Most defendants have no legal representation, there are no remand prisons and the authorities are allowed to keep prisoners in custody as long as they wish without having to provide reasons.

Sylvain Coiplot (2001) justifiably writes:

Even worse than this arrogance is the fact that reformers as well as conservatives have a common goal. The reformers too want to prevent the separation of state and religion. They only argue about how to achieve this goal. This fact is easily overlooked by outsiders. The reformers are therefore often mistaken for opponents of a theocratic state. The conservatives are making allegations in this regard but the reformers deny these categorically and vehemently support the Islamic revolution. The question is whether they only do this in order to save their own lives.

To add a further random example of human rights violations, access to higher education can only be attained after passing an exam in Islamic theology. This is an undisputed legal requirement for university studies in all of Iran (U.S. Department of State 2002:2).

¹⁰ See Schirrmacher 1995:10-11; U.S. Department of State 2001:4-5.

¹¹ Currently the best scholarly treatment is by Afshari 2001.

¹² See in particular Ebady 2000, as well as the annual reports of leading human rights organisations, e.g. Amnesty International Report 2008 and earlier years (many further reports on Iran are available at www.amnesty.org), Human Rights Watch World Report 2008, 2007, 2003, 1997; U.S. State Department 2008a, 2007 and earlier years, and the reports of the International Society for Human Rights www.ishr.org (search for Iran). Recently United Nations 2008.

¹³ See Keil 2006; Kar 2005; Afshari 2001; Karabell 2000:206-233; Strong 1997:109-217.

3. Religious freedom in general

There is no freedom of religion in Iran.¹⁴ Basic freedoms which are guaranteed by the constitution are denied to all adherents of divergent forms of Islam,¹⁵ as well as to non-Islamic minorities who are called ‘people of the book’ in the constitution, meaning Christians, Zoroastrians and Jews. They are oppressed and sometimes heavily persecuted, for example by having their leaders assassinated. All missionary work, de facto only practised by Christians and Baha’i, is strictly prohibited (Keil 2006:61-64).

A report of the U.S. Department of State on Human Rights of the year 2000 described the conditions in Iran as ‘poor’. It specified that religious minorities ‘experience varying degrees of officially sanctioned discrimination, particularly in the areas of employment, education, and housing’. Furthermore, ‘they suffer discrimination in the legal system, receiving lower awards in injury and death lawsuits, and expose themselves to the danger of receiving heavier punishment than Muslims’ (Menashri 2003:7).

Article 1 of the Iranian Constitution¹⁶ of 1980 (amended in 1989) stipulates that Iran is an “Islamic Republic”. Article 2 extensively elaborates on the role that belief in the one God, and his revelation plays in the legal system. Laws are based on the Koran and Sunna, and religious leaders watch over both, the laws as well as their application. Human dignity and freedom (Art. 2, para.6) are mentioned only in respect to human responsibility towards God, which results in the necessity of relying on the leadership of holy men. According to Article 4 all laws and regulations must without exception be “based on Islamic criteria” which have to be watched over by the ‘Guardian Council’. According to Article 11 the government is responsible for cultivating the unity of the Islamic world because all Muslims worldwide are forming a single great nation. According to Articles 19

¹⁴ On the definition and the foundational significance of religious freedom as a human right, see Schirmmacher 2000 for a brief essay and the following works for more extensive treatment: Adhar & Leigh 2005; Taylor 2005; Ferrari 2001; Cookson 2003; Witte & van der Vyveer 1996; van der Vyveer & Witte 1996; Guntau 2007.

¹⁵ The question whether one needs to differentiate between Islam itself as a religion generating religious persecution and it being abused in that regard, which is indeed an issue in other Islamic countries, hardly poses itself in Iran; cf. Schirmmacher 2002; Klingberg & Schirmmacher 2001.

¹⁶ www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/Government/constitution.html.

and 20 all people enjoy equal rights and equal protection of the law, but only “in conformity with Islamic criteria”. According to Article 14 the human rights of all non-Muslims who have not fought against Islam (Sura 60,8 is quoted here) are to be respected in accordance with Islamic ethical norms of justice, provided that they refrain from engaging in any conspiracy or activity against Islam or the Republic of Iran. One is inclined not to trust the application of Article 23 which claims that no one may be molested or punished simply for holding a certain belief. Even the “investigation of an individual's belief is forbidden”, which is otherwise presupposed by the entire constitution.

In 1984, the UN Human Rights Commission appointed a Special Rapporteur for Iran whose mandate has since then been extended annually. When Khomeini died in 1989 there was hope for improvement, which however was soon dashed (a view shared by Boyle & Sheen 1997:421-422). The reports of the UN Special Rapporteur show that the situation has instead worsened since 1990. In September 1994, the UN Sub-Commission for the Protection of Minorities condemned Iran for its increasing persecution of Christians, especially for the continuous killing of their leaders (cf. News Network International 1994). In March 1995, the Commission issued a special resolution (cf. Lawton 1995:8-10) condemning Iran for the oppression of religious minorities after the outgoing Special Representative had submitted a devastating detailed report. (The UN Human Rights Commission came to an end under the chairmanship of Sudan and after its dissolution was replaced by the UN Human Rights Council in 2006, in which 47 nations chosen by the general assembly have the right to vote. From this time onward there have rarely been any meaningful condemnations or reports on the human rights situation in non-Western countries. However, the UN General Assembly, expressed its deep concern regarding the constant deterioration of the human rights situation in Iran in a resolution on 19 December 2006, which was accepted with 72:50 votes with 55 abstentions.)

The World Reports of Human Rights Watch of 2002, 2003 and 2007 have confirmed a considerable worsening of the situation of religious minorities since 1994, and again since 2001.¹⁷

¹⁷ Concerning the lack of religious freedom see particularly Human Rights Watch World Report 2007, in which Evangelicals, Baha'i and Sufi are named as main victims.

4. Treatment of religious minorities

The suppression of religious freedom most strongly affects the largest religious minority, the Baha'i, and the non-orthodox, that is the Catholic and Protestant (especially evangelical) Christians, and the few remaining Jews. But besides these it also affects Islamic groups like the Sufis or Azeris.

4.1 Jews

The Jews are under extreme threat as they are suspected of spying for Israel. "Especially members of the Jewish community were under this suspicion. The majority of Jews living in Islamic states already emigrated by the 1950s and 1960s or were expelled or deported. At the end of the 1970s 100,000 Jews were living in Iran. Today there are only 25,000."¹⁸

4.2 Baha'i

Unlike other monotheists, the Baha'i do not enjoy any constitutional or formal protection, not even on paper. Although they are very peaceful, tolerant and supportive of human rights (Kazemzadeh 1999), they are not recognized as Dhimmis (protected monotheists) since only Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Iranians are recognized religious minorities according to Article 12 of the Constitution. Their religion was founded by Baha'u'llah in Teheran in the middle of the 19th Century.¹⁹ Since Mohammed was the last prophet according to orthodox Islamic view to whom God revealed a message, no other religions which developed after his death are granted the right to exist. The 300,000 Baha'i were already oppressed before the Islamic revolution and 200 of their leaders were killed during the revolution. Since 1993 this religion has been prohibited, even in the private sphere. There is no doubt that the Baha'i are oppressed in Iran in a most cruel manner. The goal is to at least eliminate them from

¹⁸ Menashri 2003:2. The figures are the same as in the reference works on statistics of religion named above. Detailed cases are documented most extensively in the International Religious Freedom Report 2006 of the U.S. Department of State.

¹⁹ On their history mainly see Adamson 2007; Hutter 1994; Bürgel & Schayani 1998.

the public eye.²⁰ Leaders of the pacifist Baha'i are regularly sentenced to death in fast-tracked trials.²¹

In 1993 the Special Rapporteur of the UN Commission for Human Rights published an Iranian government directive²² which lists in detail the measures taken against the Baha'i. They include total control of all their activities, denial of access to education and all important positions in the workplace, prevention of all connections to foreign countries and the elimination of influential leaders. Iran naturally denies the existence of this document.

In his last report, Copithorne²³ points out the tightening of the restrictions of religious freedom. He refers to the persecution of the Baha'i in particular, who continue to suffer from human rights violations. His report names arbitrary arrests, denial of access to higher education, dismissals and professional disqualifications. Twelve Baha'i are still in custody for religious reasons, among them Behnam Mithaqi and Kayvan Khalajabadi. Copithorne visited both men during his last visit to Iran, after which their death sentences were confirmed by the Supreme Court. The death sentences of Dhabihu'llah Mahrami and Musa Talibi have also been confirmed in the meantime, based on charges of apostasy among various other accusations. In 1996 at least 9 Baha'is identified by name were said to have been arrested because of their faith. The continued discrimination of Baha'is by the legal system is manifested, for example, in a case in which a mother was excluded from her daughter's inheritance owing to her religious affiliation.²⁴

²⁰ The most extensive documentations are to my knowledge all somewhat dated: Nationaler Geistiger Rat der Bahai in Deutschland 1995; Hearing 1984. Cole 2005 is more up to date, also compare for recent times the German Wikipedia entry http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verfolgung_der_Bahai and Enayati 2002. There is also quite a lot of material on the international website of the Baha'i (www.bahai.org; <http://question.bahai.org>; www.bahai.org/dir/worldwide/persecution), however often not going beyond 1998, eg. www.bahai.org/article-1-8-3-8.html. There is a report on the denial of access to higher education (Baha'i International Community 2005) and on persecution (Der Nationale Geistige Rat der Bahai in Deutschland 2003). More current reports appear in the yearbooks and journals of the Baha'i which are difficult to access, and on the Baha'i World News Service website. The most current listing of individual cases is found in the respective International Religious Freedom Report of the U.S. State Department.

²¹ Morigi 1998 gives the names of killed leaders of the Baha'i. Many details on the sufferings of the Baha'i, including names, can be found in U.S. Department of State 2003.

²² U.S. Department of State 1994:1182 and 1995:1081-1083; The Rutherford Institute:3.

²³ The Special Rapporteur of the UN Commission for Human Rights at that time.

²⁴ Hashemi & Adineh 1998:12.

According to the Annual Reports of Amnesty International, in one year 65 Baha'i were arrested and only some of them were released.²⁵ In the preceding year 66 had been arrested²⁶, obviously in connection with recent government instructions: "In March, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief expressed concern about an October 2005 letter instructing various government agencies to identify, and collect information about, Baha'i in Iran."²⁷

The World Report of the Human Rights Watch 2007 quotes this letter of the Supreme Leader of the Revolution, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (Human Rights Watch 2007). Consequently, approximately 54 Baha'i were arrested because they had taught poor children English, arithmetic, reading and writing free of charge (Human Rights Watch 2007).

In 2004 several holy places, which are connected with the early history of the Baha'i in Iran, were destroyed, including the birthplace of the founder of the religion. This was done in order to erase the cultural traces of this religion in Iran (Hutter 2005:118).

4.3 Muslims

Muslims are also persecuted for religious reasons. Article 12 of the Constitution says: "The official religion of Iran is Islam and the Twelver Ja'fari School", also called Twelver Shia.²⁸ The Constitution also says: "Other Islamic schools are to be accorded full respect." This is only partly true in reality. **Sunni Islam**, which has adherents mostly among the Turkish, Kurdish and Balutchi people, is not fully respected. Sunni Muslims hardly suffer any persecution from the highest government levels but frequently do so at the hands of local religious leaders and authorities. There is not a single Sunni mosque in Teheran. Sunni leaders have repeatedly complained abroad about the suppression of the Sunni faith by government authorities.²⁹

²⁵ Amnesty International 2007:191-192 (page numbers of German edition).

²⁶ Amnesty International 2006:214 (page numbers of German edition).

²⁷ Amnesty International 2007:192 (German). The report referred to: Asma Jahangir, United Nations. Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief concerned about treatment of followers of Baha'i Faith in Iran. Available online: <http://tinyurl.com/unhcr-ch>.

²⁸ On the Twelver-Shia (resp. the Ja'fari school of Islamic law) see the classic by Halm 1988:34-185, as well as Schirmacher 2002b:428-549; Schirmacher 1989:116-122; Schirmacher 1997:46-49.

²⁹ Confirmed by Boyle & Sheen 1997:425 and U.S. Department of State 2002:4-5.

Apart from the Sunnis, the Azeris are suffering persecution from their Islamic brethren, according to Human Rights Watch (2007). According to Amnesty International (AI) it is mostly the Sufis who are suffering.³⁰ According to AI, 1,000 members of the Sufi fellowship in Nematollahi were forcefully arrested, and hundreds were injured because they refused to leave their mosque in February 2006. In May 2006, 52 Sufis who intended to make legal representation on behalf of the others were sentenced to corporal punishment. The lawyers taking part in this action were professionally disbarred. "In a fatwa of August the Sufis were declared 'null and void' as a religious fellowship."³¹ (A fatwa is a religious opinion on Islamic law issued by an Islamic scholar which is binding to the Iranian authorities.)

Even Shiite leaders are not protected from religious persecution. The World Report of Human Rights Watch 2003 states that the Supreme Ayatollah Hossain Ali Montazeri, formerly the designated successor of Ayatollah Khomeini, is under house arrest in Qom owing to his deviating religious views, and other older Shiite leaders are being persecuted.³²

4.4 Orthodox and Catholic Christians

Even though the **Armenian and Assyrian (Nestorian) Christians** are granted one seat in Parliament – like the Jews and Zoroastrians – and even though they are not suspected of siding with Western powers owing to their lengthy history in Iran, their religious freedom is still negligible. One cannot even talk about traditional toleration and partial autonomy such as had been granted to orthodox minorities in large parts of the Islamic world for centuries. There is little known about their situation, however, because traditionally they tend not to spread information abroad.

The emigration of one quarter of the 200,000 Armenians – all Persians who love their home country – speaks for itself, especially since a further 7% of the 150,000 remaining population continue to emigrate annually (Boyle & Sheen 1997:423). According to the

³⁰ Amnesty International 2007:191-192 (German). This is confirmed by U.S. Department of State 2006.

³¹ Amnesty International 2007:191 (German).

³² Human Rights Watch 2003:5; there are many reports on the Internet on Hossain Ali Montazeri, eg. available online: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2699541.stm.

findings of the UN Special Rapporteur, approximately 15,000 to 20,000 Christians of all denominations are emigrating from Iran annually (U.S. Department of State 2002:2). Regardless whether one assumes an approximate number of between 115,000-120,000 Christians as does the Iranian government, or 300,000 Christians as does the UN Special Rapporteur (:2), the Christian minority in Iran could become negligible in the near future.

The situation of the **Catholic congregations** is very different from that of the long-established Orthodox churches, even though some of them have also been in the country for centuries. On 10 August 1979 all Catholic priests and members of Catholic orders were ordered to leave the country within one month, while the Protestants and Anglicans had to leave the country immediately. The Archbishop of Teheran was expelled.

In June 1980 the authorities closed all catholic schools which were referred to as 'foreign'. According to Didier Rance, the anti-Christian repression has two aspects: on the one hand it is discrimination and on the other it is the attempt to assimilate, which is being carried out mostly by means of school classes and indoctrination during military service. The Islamization of the school system touches all aspects of education: The young Christians need to memorize texts which are saturated with Islamic propaganda and which slander and insult the Christian religion (Morigi 1998).

Churches in Iran and their estimated membership 2001³³

Denomination	Congregations	Members	Adherents
Armenian-Apostolic	63	72,368	110,000
Nestorians	8	7,692	11,000
Catholics	17	4,000	7,000
Presbyterians	9	1,703	3,100
Pentecostals	12	1,400	3,000
Anglicans	3	480	1,200
12 other denominations	16	6,000	9,000
Christians in total	129	94,000	145,000

³³ Estimates as of the end of 2001 by Johnstone 2005:353, updated according to www.operationworld.org.

4.5 Protestant Christians

The government is more hostile towards the Protestant churches because of their privileged relationships with Western countries which are in greatest enmity to the Iranian government, and also because of their greater missionary initiative. According to the report of Human Rights without Frontiers, the persecution of Protestants increased during the 1990s. Four Protestant leaders died under circumstances which cannot exclude complicity of the government. (Source: *Droits de l'homme sans frontières*, March 13, 1998 quoted by Morigi 1998:section on Iran, p.2).

The greatest monitoring efforts are aimed at conversions from Islam to the Baha'i religion and to Protestant Evangelical Christianity, and such converts are prosecuted most severely. Apostasy from Islam is subject to the death penalty, both in theory and in practice. The death penalty is imposed by the courts of justice and executed in prison but also carried out by Hezbollah groups by means of secret or public assassination. Capital punishment for apostasy from Islam, while so far not stipulated by law, is based on a decree issued by Ayatollah Khomeini and is considered to be part of the Sharia. The decrees of the Ayatollah and the numerous fatwas of renowned Islamic clerics are considered as legal sources in their own right, as the infamous case of Salman Rushdie has shown. He was sentenced to death because, although being born as a Muslim (in India), he became secularised and disinterested in Islam. Often a law, promulgated in 1996, is referred to which provides for capital punishment for espionage. In practice all Catholic and Protestant Christians are automatically suspect of espionage because of their contacts abroad.

In 1994 the Fellowship of Protestant Churches was seriously shaken by the assassination of three of their most important elected representatives. It began with Pastor Mehdi Dibaj who was sentenced to death in 1984 because of his conversion from Islam to Christianity 45 years previously. When Pastor Haik Hovespian-Mehr started an international campaign for Dibaj he achieved the release of Dibaj at the beginning of 1994 only to disappear himself a few days later. His family was told that he had been murdered. In April 1994 a fatwa appeared in a Teheran newspaper demanding the killing of Dibaj. Finally, halfway through 1994, Dibaj also disappeared. In July his body was 'found' by the government. His successor as chair of the Council of Protestant Churches, Pastor Tateo's Michaelian was

murdered in June 1994. The prominent pastor Mohammad Bagher Yusefi who looked after Dibaj's children, was found hanged in the vicinity of his home at the end of 1996.³⁴

Evangelical Christians frequently disappear after having been kept in custody for a short period of time, especially those who had formerly been Muslims (often before 1979!).³⁵ The International Religious Freedom Report 2001 reports that between 15 to 23 evangelical leaders who disappeared were murdered between November 1997 and November 1998 (U.S. Department of State 2001:6). Each year new cases are reported.

In its annual report of 2006 (:214), Amnesty International mentions that Hamid Pourmand who had converted from Islam to Christianity and whose change of religion had been neither accepted nor registered by the army, was sentenced to three years in prison because he was said to have misled the military concerning his change of religion. In its annual report of 2007 (:191), AI reports the arrest of the daughter and son-in-law of the above mentioned Medhi Dibaj who was murdered in 1994, immediately after his release from nine years imprisonment because of alleged apostasy.

The printing of any kind of Christian literature, even that of internal information bulletins for use during a church service, is prohibited. The evangelical churches have gone underground because they were instructed to submit membership lists (U.S. Department of State 2002:2) and were forced, apart from other oppressive measures, to hold their services in Assyrian or Armenian languages which they can neither speak nor understand. Any church service in Persian, their mother tongue, is severely sanctioned.

³⁴ These details are based on the research by the Center for Religious Freedom of the US human rights organization Freedom House, Washington DC, www.freedomhouse.org/religion/martyrs/iran.htm and The Rutherford Institute 1996:5. Cf. the special report of News Network International of 26 July 1994. On Yusefi also see the detailed report "Another Iranian Christian Pays the Ultimate Price" by the Persian organization Elam Ministries at www.domini.org/openbook/iran1.htm.

³⁵ International Christian Concern, Washington (www.persecution.org/suffering/country_info.php?iran.html) is providing current news and cases. A report on Iran of September 2006, which is no longer available online gave 16 detailed individual cases between 1997-2001.

The officially registered evangelical churches are permitted to meet only on Sundays. The pastor is obliged to inform the government before any new members may be admitted, after which the members receive special identity papers which they have to carry at all times. At the beginning of a church service these identity papers are often checked by a religious guard at the entrance or at times even during the church service. Even in Teheran, other Iranians and tourists are prevented from entering church premises (:6).

According to the Representative Body of the Iranian Christians founded in 1980/81 (a type of Protestant Church Council in exile), Iranian Christians International (ICI),³⁶ the persecution of Christians has been increasing since 2000.³⁷ The number of Christians, however, is equally growing (mostly owing to the turning away from Iranian Islam which is experienced as cruel and disappointing), while simultaneously large numbers are emigrating. According to the figures of ICI, there were 16,000 Protestant Iranian Christians in exile worldwide in 1990, in 1994 36,000, and in 1999 55,000, half of which are converts from Islam. The remainder are from other religious minorities or from Christian families.

Occasionally even evangelical leaders from Western countries are being subjected to the Iranian justice system, that is, if they dare to enter the country at all. For example, Stuart Timm, a South African citizen, was kept in custody for 26 days while on holiday in Iran in 1997. He was released only after the South African government exerted extensive pressure. Another example is Daniel Baumann, who holds dual Swiss and American citizenships, who was denied contact with either embassy.³⁸ In both cases no charges were laid and no explanation was given.

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³⁶ Iranian Christians International, P.O. Box 25607, Colorado Springs, CO 80936, USA. www.iranchristians.org. A global list of all Iranian churches in exile is available at: www.farsinet.com/icc.

³⁷ Confirmed from a Roman-Catholic perspective by Morigi 1998.

³⁸ See the detailed report: "Western Christians detained in Iran" by Iranian Christians International at www.domini.org/openbook/irn70224.htm.

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WEA religious liberty press release: Iran - Apostasy law

Keywords Iran, apostasy law, death penalty, WEA, appeal.

February 18, 2009: [The World Evangelical Alliance] strongly condemns the systematic and ongoing violations of religious freedom, including prolonged detention, torture, and executions based primarily or entirely upon the religion of the accused, especially for religious minorities such as Protestant Christians.

WEA notes that the constitution of Iran formally recognizes Christians as protected religious minorities who may worship freely and have autonomy over their own matters of personal status. Nevertheless, the primacy of Islam and Islamic laws, in particular the recent Apostasy law, adversely affects the rights and status of Christian minorities, who are already subject to severe forms of discrimination.

WEA acknowledges that Christians in Iran, in particular Evangelicals, continue to be subject to harassment, arrests, close surveillance, and imprisonment. WEA also recalls that the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad reportedly has called for an end to the development of Christianity in Iran, and that over the past few years, there have been several incidents of Iranian authorities raiding church services, detaining worshippers and church leaders, and harassing and threatening church members.

WEA expresses concern over the recent penal code revision, and opposes the death penalty as a matter of law and policy. This law clearly violates the Islamic Republic of Iran's commitments under the international human rights conventions, by codifying serious punishments, including the death penalty on converts from Islam. Therefore, it is considered in itself a clear violation of Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which reads: "Every human being has the inherent right to life" an important and binding international document which Iran has ratified in 1975 without any pre-conditions, in addition to Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which reads: "Everyone has the right to life", and Article 18 of the same declaration which reads: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion."

WEA hereby expresses its deep and grave concerns and apprehension of the implications of the Penal Code, which sets out a mandatory death sentence for apostasy, in addition to other severe limitations and restrictions on freedom of religion and belief.

Therefore, WEA calls upon the Iranian authorities, both in government and parliament, to address the substantive concerns highlighted in this letter, and to fully respect its human rights obligations, in law and in practice.

WEA calls for abolishment of the death penalty carried out in the absence of respect for internationally recognized safeguards.

WEA calls on all democratic governments at the highest levels, to vigorously speak out publicly about the deteriorating conditions for freedom of religion or belief in Iran, and draw attention to the need for the international community to hold authorities accountable in specific cases where severe violations have occurred or will occur especially in respect to the recently passed Apostasy law that legalizes the death penalty for apostates.

WEA calls on the UN Human Rights Council to monitor carefully and call for with the recommendations of the representatives of those special mechanisms that have already visited Iran, particularly those of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief (1995).

Dr. Geoff Tunnicliffe, Executive Director - International Director / CEO, World Evangelical Alliance (WEA)

Mr. Godfrey Yogarajah, Religious Liberty Commission, World Evangelical Alliance (WEA)

The World Evangelical Alliance is made up of 128 national evangelical alliances located in 7 regions and 104 associate member organizations. The vision of WEA is to extend the Kingdom of God by making disciples of all nations and by Christ-centered transformation within society. WEA exists to foster Christian unity, to provide an identity, voice and platform for the 420 million evangelical Christians worldwide.

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Source: <http://tinyurl.com/wea-iran>.

Germany's asylum policy and Iran's new apostasy law

Thomas Zimmermanns*

Abstract

This analysis deals in an exemplary way with the challenge of how to interpret information about religious persecution in countries of origin of refugees and asylum seekers within the legal framework of recipient countries.

Keywords Iran, draft apostasy law, asylum, deportation, legislation, policy, legal opinion.

1. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees in Germany recently published an article in its bulletin *Entscheidungen Asyl Informations-Schnelldienst*¹ regarding religious freedom in Iran and particularly the situation of the Christians there. One can assume that this is not simply a noncommittal opinion of the Federal Office or the author of that contribution but that the aim of the article is to serve as a recommendation or basis for the decision makers of the Federal Office.

The author comes to the conclusion that although Islam is the state religion, the Iranian constitution guarantees adherents of Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrism the right “to exercise within the framework of the laws their religious customs and ceremonial practices and to live in accordance with ecclesiastical prescriptions in personal matters and religious education.” Therefore only Christian congregations with converts from Islam or which engage in public and active missionary work amongst Muslims, would have to expect systematic restraints or persecution by the state. Equally priests and

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¹ Jürgen de Haan, Zur Religionsfreiheit im Iran, in: *Entscheidungen Asyl, Informations-Schnelldienst* vol. 15, 7/2008:5-6. Available online: <http://tinyurl.com/BAMF08>. The website of the agency is: www.bamf.de.

other leaders of congregations and churches who are particularly active in the public domain would have to expect persecution.

Although the Sharia provides for the death penalty for apostasy, i.e. the conversion from Islam to Christianity (or any other religion), the criminal law of the state does not include any regulations for punishment of apostasy if apostasy is not linked to political activities. There are also no known cases in which the death penalty has actually been imposed, or of extra judicial killings for apostasy.

The author is of the opinion that even the fact that an existing draft bill which calls for conversion from Islam to Christianity to be subjected to the death penalty does not change the situation described. He believes that this draft bill is merely intended as a warning to discourage Muslims from converting to Christianity; there is thus no serious intention to pass the bill and to apply it. To strengthen his point he refers to a meeting that took place in April 2008 between the Papal Council for Inter-religious Dialogue and Shiite spiritual leaders in which the participants had agreed to mutually tolerate and respect each other's religion.

A situation of persecution of Christians in Iran in the proper sense is thus denied, except for the above mentioned cases, and it is postulated that there exists merely a general social and economic marginalization of Christians.

The unspoken legal consequence of this depiction of the situation in Iran is probably the opinion that the condition of 'persecution for reasons of faith' is not fulfilled at present in the case of Christians, so that should they enter Germany they would not have any claim to neutral asylum or protection from deportation.

2.1 It is important to note, however, that the situation of Christians in Iran as described in that article should already lead to a different legal conclusion. For § 60 par. 1 p. 1 Law on Residence grants protection from deportation, if the life or freedom of the deportee is threatened for reasons of the religion in the country into which someone is to be deported.

In terms of § 60 par. 2 and 3 of the Law on Residence the same applies in cases of impending torture or death penalty for the same reasons. According to the jurisdiction of the Federal Constitutional Court and the Federal Administrative Court such a threat based on the

religion cannot be assumed if the relevant person has been granted the so-called religious subsistence minimum in the state to which he is to be deported.² Practising faith privately, such as in the form of home services and witness in a private group, where Christians are by themselves, was hitherto regarded as sufficient to guarantee the religious subsistence minimum (see preceding footnote). The writer of the article in the Express Information Service, or rather the Federal Office, apparently assumes that this religious minimum subsistence for Christians is currently protected in Iran.

2.2 Furthermore the article is based on an incorrect or at least incomplete description of the situation in Iran. In the current situation (that has been going on for a long time) Christians in Iran cannot even practice their faith in the very limited form regarded as possible and sufficient in the article. It is even stated in the article itself that congregations admitting former Muslims can expect systematic restraints and even persecution by state organs forthwith, i.e. also without any public appearance of these former Muslims or the remaining members of the congregation. Thus an elderly Christian couple was killed a few months ago as a result of a raid on an underground prayer group meeting. The secret police had dispersed the meeting on 27 July 2008 and had beaten and arrested the participants. Only a couple of days later the husband died from the serious injuries he sustained; at the beginning of August his wife died from the consequences of emotional stress.³ Of course, every Christian congregation is under an obligation to accept as members people who have turned to Jesus Christ in conversion and wish to join the congregation, irrespective of their ethnic origins, their social rank or the religion to which they formerly belonged (see Gal 3:28; Eph 2:14ff).

Both in classic reference works regarding religious freedom and persecution of Christians that are categorised according to countries and in the annual reports of human rights organisations and the U.S. government regarding the state of human rights and religious freedom, every year Iran is among the most obvious examples of states in which there is no religious freedom and in which even adherents of the state religion are persecuted and restrained brutally if they express

² See e.g. Federal Constitutional Court Ruling 74:31ff, 38, 40; 76:143ff, 158; Federal Administrative Court 111:223ff, 230.

³ *Idea Spektrum* 33/08:27.

divergent opinions.⁴ The non-Muslim minorities mentioned in the article in the Express Information Service are being oppressed and are sometimes persecuted seriously, for example by having their leaders murdered.

The most massive surveillance and persecution occur in the case of conversions from Islam to the Baha'i and protestant-evangelical Christian faith. Defection from Islam is not only in theory subject to the death penalty, but also in practice, contrary to what is stated by the representation in the article of the Express Information Service. The death penalty for apostasy is in fact imposed by the courts and executed in prisons, and Hezbollah groups commit secret or public murders to punish apostasy. The official reason stated for imposing and executing the death penalty is often not the breaking with Islam, but some other (alleged) crimes, such as for example espionage. While the threat of the death penalty for breaking with Islam is not contained in the law, it goes back to an order by Ayatollah Khomeini which is regarded as part of the Sharia. These orders by the Ayatollah and numerous related *fatwa* (binding legal opinions) of important Islamic scholars are regarded as a separate legal authority in Iran. This is indeed made possible by the constitution of Iran, according to section 167 which states which crimes may be punished on which "there are no laws", but the criminal liability of which derives from other legal authorities. This became publicly known particularly through the pronouncement of the death penalty on Salman Rushdie and the appeal to murder him, based on the fact that Rushdie, who was born in India as a Muslim, had broken with Islam.

Furthermore it is necessary to point out that officially registered evangelical congregations may only meet on Sundays. The pastor has to inform the government before a member is accepted, whereupon the member receives a special permit which he has to carry with him at all times. At the beginning of a service the permits are often controlled by guardians of religions at the entrance or sometimes even during the service. Even in Teheran Iranians without a permit and tourists are prevented from entering church premises.

⁴ The overwhelming evidence is summarized with numerous references by Thomas Schirrmacher, Persecution of religious minorities and suppression of religious freedom in Iran, IJRF (2)1, 2009:111-130 which is the source this opinion piece is quoting, unless otherwise stated.

2.3 Furthermore, the article completely ignores the EU directive 2004/83/EG dated 29/04/2004. This states in section 10 para. 1 b that when assessing persecution for religious reasons it has to be taken into consideration that the concept of religion includes participation in religious rites in private *or public* (emphasis by author). Public practising of faith and the minimum religious subsistence in this sense include e.g. holding public services, missionary and evangelistic activities – also outside the private realm, performing baptisms in private and public, the right of a church to determine its own affairs and many others.⁵ All of this is currently not guaranteed for Christians in Iran and for a long time has not been safeguarded and would result in persecution threatening the life or freedom of the people concerned. The above-mentioned EU directive has also been the binding law of the member states of the EU since 10/10/2006. In accordance with section 38 para. 1, p. 1 this directive had to be implemented into national law of the member states by that date; if this has not happened, as in the case of Germany, the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice determines that the directive shall be valid immediately after expiry of the implementation period, subject to certain conditions – which are given here – in favour of the individual citizen (Zimmermanns 2008:5; 7-8).

Accordingly, in a judgement of 19/10/2006 (A 6 K 10335/04) the Administrative Court of Karlsruhe has granted protection against deportation in favour of a woman who had come from Iran, had become a Christian in Germany and was baptised. The Administrative Court of Stuttgart made a similar judgement a few months later (01/06/2007 – A 11 K 1005/06).

3. But above all, the article in the Express Information Service does not give any, respectively any proper attention to the amendment of the law threatening the conversion of a Muslim to Christianity with the death penalty, with regards to the resulting persecution situation, respectively with regards to the aggravation of the persecution situation.

3.1 The relevant draft bill is not merely a measure to “threaten” and intimidate, but one can assume that it is to be enacted and applied. The

⁵ See Thomas Zimmermanns, *Abschiebungsschutz für verfolgte Christen* [Protection against deportation for persecuted Christians], MBS-Texte 92, 2008:8-12, - www.bucer.eu/uploads/media/mbstexte092_b.pdf.

assessment of the bill as a mere ‘threat’ is astonishing: as a matter of principle each draft bill must be assumed to be taken seriously, that it is to be enacted and that the law will then also be applied, unless in the exceptional case where there are important reasons to the contrary. But there is no evidence of such reasons. On the contrary, a representative of the Department of Foreign Affairs declared in the Human Rights Committee of the Federal Parliament of Germany at the beginning of 2008 that the planned apostasy law “was cause for the greatest concerns”. When the bill was read for the first time on 09/09/2008 it had already been passed by the Iranian Parliament.⁶ It is only the approval of the Islamic Guardian Council that is still necessary for the enactment of this Act. This bill provides that the death sentence is the only possible punishment in case of conversion of a male Muslim from Islam to Christianity or another religion.⁷ It appears that the law is also to be applied to Muslims who converted even before the enactment of the Act.⁸ Compared to the previous legal position this is a further noticeable intensification. While so far the change of religions is regarded as a ‘crime’ by the Sharia, the nature and extent of the punishment is within the discretion of the court. According to the planned law the death penalty is not only imminent if a convert practices or confesses his new faith in public, but even due to the fact of the conversion as such, the decisive element of which is regarded as a declaration by the convert to a third party that he or she does not want to be a Muslim any longer.⁹ Therefore the minimum religious subsistence is not given any longer to converted Muslims, even according to the strictest definition of this term, and the conditions of § 60 para 3 of the law of permanent residence are fulfilled.

⁶ *Idea Spektrum* 39/08:14.

⁷ The bill i.r.o. § 225 par. 7 and 8 of the Islamic Law of Retaliation provides this. For a woman breaking with Islam, the highest penalty is life-long imprisonment in terms of the bill i.r.o. § 225 par. 10, while she has to be whipped during the five daily prayer times and her quality of life and quantity of food, clothing and water have to be reduced to intensify her imprisonment until she shows remorse.

⁸ *Idea Spektrum* 39/08:14.

⁹ See bill i.r.o. § 225 par. 1 of the Islamic Law of Retaliation: “Every Muslim proclaiming clearly that he or she has broken with Islam and confesses him-/herself to be an unbeliever, is an apostate”. “Unbelief” does not only imply atheism, but any other religion besides Islam.

3.2 Finally, the joint declaration by the Shiite and Catholic theologians mentioned in the article by the Federal Office does not change this outcome in the least. Although it is stated in no. 3 of the joint declaration: "Neither reason nor faith should be used for violence" and it is stated in no. 5 "Christians and Muslims should go beyond tolerance ... " as well as "They [Christians and Muslims] are called to mutual respect ... " However, this declaration is not binding for the state organs of Iran and will therefore not have any influence on the legislation and jurisdiction. There is also the fact that the leader of the Iranian delegation was not an Ayatollah, but Mahdi Mostafavi, the leader of the "Islamic Culture and Relations Organization" (ICRO) in Teheran. According to their self-portrayal, this organisation is linked to the Department of Foreign Affairs of Teheran and acts in accordance with the orders of the leader of the Islamic revolution and the foreign affairs directives of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This indicates strongly that this declaration was only signed by the Iranian-Shiite side with the intention to deceive and that only the prevalent (criminal) law as well as the Sharia are and will remain decisive for the legal position of Christians in Iran.

4. The description of the persecution situation of Christians in Iran with regard to the asylum and deportation law of Germany as well as the assessment of the Iranian draft apostasy law in the article in the Express Information Service of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees therefore, on closer evaluation, has to be regarded as inappropriate and merely playing down the situation.

Noteworthy

As a service to our readers we have again selected noteworthy items on religious freedom. This time they stem almost exclusively from secular sources on the Internet and are structured in three groups: Annual reports and global surveys, regional and country reports (sorted alphabetically), and specific issues. Though we apply serious criteria in the selection of items noted, it is beyond our capacity to scrutinize the accuracy of every statement made. We therefore disclaim responsibility for the contents of the items noted. The compiler was Dr Byeong Hei Jun; he holds a PhD in Islamic Studies from the University of the Western Cape, South Africa.

Personalia

Schirmmacher receives Finnish Human Rights Award

<http://tinyurl.com/57fsf5>. (Bonn, 10 November 2008) The Bonn based human rights activist, Thomas Schirmmacher, received this year's "International *Pro Fide* Award" from the Finish organization "Friends of the Martyrs" for his ongoing international efforts on behalf of persecuted Christians and followers of other religions. The award money will be used on behalf of Iraqi refugees.

Since 1991 the annual award has been granted to a person "whose work has made a pronounced difference in the lives of persecuted Christians." Some of the previous recipients include Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand (Romania), Archbishop Samuel Aktas (Turkey), Bishop Paride Taban (Sudan), Bishop Laslo Tökes (Romania), and Godfrey Yogarajah (Sri Lanka).

The award ceremony was included in the General Assembly of the World Evangelical Alliance in Pattaya, Thailand, with about 600 people present. It came at the end of a two-hour platform discussion on the themes of freedom of religion and the persecution of Christians, with participants from all the continents. The award was presented by the Lutheran pastor, Johan Candelin, religious freedom advisor to the Finnish Parliament. Candelin especially emphasized that the recipient and his team have made the problems of the persecution of Christians and the denial of religious freedom well documented matters of public knowledge, which are now trusted by academics, politicians, and the media.

Because the recipient was especially thanked for efforts to assist Christian refugees from Iraq in Jordan and Syria, the legal advisor from the UN Refugee Commission for Jordan, Yara Hussein, participated in the discussion and award ceremony. She congratulated the recipient in the name of the UN Refugee Commission and thanked him for his international engagement on behalf of Iraqi refugees in Jordan and Syria. He played an

essential role in bringing this theme into international public discussion, so that Germany, the EU, the US, and Canada now plan to accept groups of refugees from Iraqi minorities.

The International Director of the World Evangelical Alliance, Geoff Tunnicliffe, explicitly endorsed the International Institute for Religious Freedom, which is led by Thomas Schirrmacher. This institute represents a concern which has been central for the WEA since its founding.

Annual reports and global surveys

European gateway to country of origin information

ecoi.net provides up-to-date and publicly available country of origin information with a special focus on the needs of asylum lawyers, refugee counsels and persons deciding on claims for asylum and other forms of international protection. Access to information is facilitated by a comprehensive search tool and Topics & Issues files, offering thematically structured information on asylum-relevant topics and issues for a set of focus countries. It does not cover events in all countries of the world to the same extent, but there is a focus on countries of origin of asylum applicants in Europe. <www.ecoi.net>.

The State of the World's Human Rights

Amnesty International Report 2008, 383 p. <http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/download-report>>. “Published in the 60th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Amnesty International Report 2008 documents human rights issues in 150 countries and territories around the world... It reveals a world driven by inequality, scarred by discrimination and distorted by political repression.” Amnesty International <www.amnesty.org> see themselves as human rights defenders who expose violations and take peaceful action to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights for all.

World Report Book

Human Rights Watch 2008, 581 p. <<http://tinyurl.com/hrw008>>. “Human Rights Watch conducts regular, systematic investigations of human rights abuses in some seventy countries around the world ... We address the human rights practices of governments of all political stripes, of all geopolitical alignments, and of all ethnic and religious persuasions.”(4).

2008 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom

U.S. Department of State, September 2008 (Extensive length; exact number of pages not indicated) www.state.gov/g/drl/irf>. The International Religious Freedom report is submitted to the US Congress annually by the Department of State in compliance with Section 102(b) of the International Religious

Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998. “The purpose of this report is to record the status of respect for religious freedom in every country around the world during the most recent reporting period – July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008. Our primary focus is to document the actions of governments – those that repress religious expression, persecute believers, and tolerate violence against religious minorities, as well as those that protect and promote religious freedom. We also address societal attitudes on religion and religious minorities and record positive and negative actions taken by non-governmental actors. We strive to report fairly and accurately, with sensitivity to the complexity of religious freedom issues.”

The worst of the worst

The World's Most Repressive Societies, May 2008, 124 p. <<http://tinyurl.com/fh2008>>. The reports are excerpted from Freedom in the World 2008, which surveys the state of freedom in 193 countries and 15 select territories in the world. <http://www.freedomhouse.org>.

Map of freedom 2008

Freedom House. <www.freedomhouse.org>. The Freedom in the World 2008 survey contains the following information for each country (193 countries) report: population, capital, political rights (numerical rating), civil liberties (numerical rating), status (Free, Partly Free, or Not Free), and a ten-year ratings timeline. Map of Freedom 2008 <<http://tinyurl.com/MOF2008>>, Combined average ratings: independent countries 2008 <http://tinyurl.com/Tbls2008>>.

UN Watch Scorecard: Key UNHRC actions in 2007-2008

May 2008:23. <<http://tinyurl.com/UNW2008>> UN Watch is a non-governmental organization based in Geneva whose mandate is to monitor the performance of the United Nations by the yardstick of its own charter. This document analyses UN Human Rights Council Key Actions. “In 2007-2008, the vast majority of states escaped censure by the Council, including serial violators such as Iran, China and Sri Lanka. There were only 18 country-specific resolutions, dealing only with a handful of countries: nine censures of Israel, four censures of Burma, one censure of North Korea, three non-condemnatory resolutions on Sudan, and one resolution that eliminated the Council's mandate to investigate abuses in the Democratic Republic of Congo...”(:3). “... effectively grants impunity to worst violators of religious freedom in the Middle East.”(:6).

Hate crimes in the OSCE region - incidents and responses

Annual Report for 2007, Warsaw, October 2008, 183 p. <http://tinyurl.com/osce08>>. The aim of the report is to provide an overview of practical

efforts and measures undertaken by governments and civil society to combat violent and non-violent manifestations of hate and to promote mutual respect and understanding. The development of this report is based on the task the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Violence based on religious intolerance

Hate Crime Survey 2008, New York: Human Rights First, May 2008. 17p. <<http://tinyurl.com/HCS2008>> “Violence motivated by religious intolerance continued to be reported in many countries in Europe and North America in 2007 and 2008. Members of religious minorities throughout the region were subjected to numerous physical assaults causing serious injury or death...”(:1). This section of the report covers violence against adherents and property of vulnerable religious minorities other than Jews or Muslims (who are allocated separate reports) in Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide Annual Report 2007-08

28 p. Visit <<http://www.csw.org.uk/annualreport.htm>>.

Lausanne World Pulse

The November 2008 issue of this bulletin focuses on the persecuted church. 35 p. <www.lausanneworldpulse.com/index.php>

Märtyrer 2008: Das Jahrbuch zur Christenverfolgung

Max Klingberg, Thomas Schirmacher, Ron Kubsch (eds), Studies in Religious Freedom – ISSN 1618-7865, vol 12. Bonn: VKW 2008 234 p. ISBN 978-3-938116-47-0. Also published as idea-Dokumentation 9/2008. For full German text visit <<http://tinyurl.com/5zm4tt>>.

Regional and country reports

South Asia Human Rights Index 2008

Asian Centre for Human Rights, August 2008, 185 p. <www.achrweb.org/reports/SAARC-2008.pdf> “The South Asia Human Rights Violators Index 2008 is based on comparative assessment of records of the governments in 2007 on nine thematic issues crucial for enjoyment of human rights: political freedom, right to life, judiciary and administration of justice, status or effectiveness of National Human Rights Institutions, press freedom, violence against women, violations of the rights of the child, violations of the rights of the minorities and indigenous/tribal peoples and repression on human rights defenders” (:9). It covers Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Pakistan, Maldives, Nepal, India, and Afghanistan.

Afghanistan Analyst Bibliography

August 2008 compiled by Christian Bleuer, *The Afghanistan Analyst*, 123 p. <<http://tinyurl.com/AFGBib>>. It is a resource for studying and researching contemporary Afghanistan after the late 1970s.

Bangladesh: Country of Origin Information Report

Country of Origin Information Service, UK Border Agency, September 2008, 199 p. <www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/country_reports.html>.

On freedom of religion (:102-111): “The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion but provides for the right to profess, practice, or propagate, subject to law, public order, and morality, the religion of one's choice. It also stated that every religious community or denomination has the right to establish, maintain, and manage its religious institutions.” -- The Country of Origin Information Service (COI Service) provides accurate, objective, up-to-date, sourced information on numerous asylum seekers' countries of origin. This information mainly focuses on human rights issues and is meant for UK Border Agency officials involved in the asylum determination process. Specialist country officers in the COI Service research compile and produce country of origin information (COI). They monitor the position in their countries daily and have access to all the most up-to-date COI sources. All COI products are compiled from reliable material produced by external information sources.

Burma

17 September 2008: Christian Solidarity Worldwide and Partners Relief & Development UK launch campaign to see lasting change for Burma! <www.csw.org.uk>. “A major new online campaign ... calling the United Nations to increase pressure for change in Burma ...” Visit <<http://tinyurl.com/4ykc4s>>.

China: Falun Gong and the human rights crisis in China

“The Falun Dafa Information Center is both the official press office for Falun Gong as well as a primary resource for information about the human rights abuses Falun Gong practitioners face at the hands of the Chinese Communist regime.” <www.faluninfo.net/category/10>. See the following samples of press release headings:

FDIC: Beijing Resident Killed During Olympics for Practicing Falun Gong. 24 September 2008. An elderly Falun Gong practitioner, Wang Chongjun (65) died at home on 23 August 2008 after being injected with an unknown drug in a Beijing labor camp. <<http://tinyurl.com/4ctyqt>>.

Falun Gong Dagnet Outside Beijing. 7 August 2008 by Cindy Drukker. Chinese police in Hebei Province have admitted to placing photos

of Falun Gong founder Li Hongzhi on the ground, forcing commuters to step on them in order to pass. <<http://tinyurl.com/3hyzux>>.

India: Religious freedom and religious persecution issues in India

European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ), February 2008, 29 p. <<http://tinyurl.com/India08>>. This report was prepared in anticipation of the official visit by the UN Special Rapporteur on *Freedom of Religion or Belief* to India, in March 2008. "Religious minorities in India, particularly Christians and Muslims, suffer religious persecution daily, even despite nominal protection granted under India's Constitution" (:2).

India: Letter by Orissa bishops to government to rebuild churches

Asia News <<http://tinyurl.com/Oris08>>. The bishops of three Roman Catholic Orissa dioceses have sent a letter on 10 November 2008 to Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik in which they denounce the pervasive reign of terror that hangs over Christians who have been attacked by radical Hindu groups for months. In order to stop the Christian exodus from the state – many Christians have moved to neighbouring states – the bishops urge the authorities to act quickly to rebuild churches before Christmas.

Iran: Advancing freedom in Iran

by Steven Groves, Backgrounder #2019, March 2007, 10 p. (Produced by The Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom) <<http://tinyurl.com/Iran07>>. "The Iranian constitution restricts individual and political rights and legitimises a despotic government that consolidates all power and authority in the hands of an unaccountable clerical regime."

Iran: Discrimination and intolerance in Iran's textbooks

by Saeed Paivandi, Freedom House, 2008, 80 p. <<http://tinyurl.com/txtbk08>>. "The government of Iran is teaching the country's children to discriminate against women and minorities, to view non-Muslims with suspicion if not contempt, and to perpetuate the regime's theocratic ideology. Discrimination and intolerance are deeply ingrained in the textbooks that make up the core of Iran's school curriculum" (:1).

Israel and the Palestinian territories: Religious freedom in ...

Report of Mission, European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ), April 2008, 173 p. <<http://tinyurl.com/isra08>>. This report was prepared as pursuant to the ECLJ mission to Israel and the Palestinian territories in January 2008, in conjunction with the official visit by the UN Special Rapporteur on *Freedom of Religion or Belief*. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is a public interest law firm that specializes in protecting religious freedom and other human rights at the European institutions as well as internationally.

Palestinian columnist: Muslims are harming Christian culture

Special Dispatch Series - No. 2112. The Middle East Media Research Institute, November 12, 2008. <<http://tinyurl.com/pale08>>. "In his column in the Palestinian daily Al-Ayyam on October 25, 2008, 'Abd Al-Nasser Al-Najjar criticized the persecution of Christians in Arab countries, with a particular emphasis on the Christian population of the Palestinian authority."

Pakistan: Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

Human Rights Commission of Pakistan: State of Human Rights in 2007, February 2008, p.102-110. <<http://tinyurl.com/Pak08a>>. "Recommendations: 1) it is time the official policy of indiscriminate pandering to the conservative clerics was given up; 2) all laws that allow discrimination on grounds of belief must be repealed or reformed; 3) while use of force is necessary to overcome the stubborn militants, due attention must be paid to de-weaponizing society; 4) the state must take steps to encourage research in and propagation of what many scholars describe as humanistic and liberal traditions of Islam" (:9).

Pakistan: Religious freedom in Pakistan

Universal Periodic Review 2008 – Report to UN by European Center for Law and Justice, Strasbourg, France, 22 p. <<http://tinyurl.com/Pak08b>>. Discusses legal framework and 13 selected recent incidents of persecution or discrimination from September 2005 to January 2008, which are briefly documented in the appendix.

Russia: Religious freedom survey

by Geraldine Fagan, Forum 18 News Service, October 2008, 5 p. <http://tinyurl.com/Russ08>>. "The gravest current threat to freedom of thought, conscience and belief in Russia comes from the federal government's approach to combating religious extremism, Forum 18 News Service finds in its survey analysis of religious freedom. In the wake of the 2002 Extremism Law, moderate Muslim literature has been outlawed as inciting religious extremism – despite the reasoning behind this being questionable. This has led to harassment and sometimes prosecution of alleged authors, distributors or simply readers ..."

Saudi Arabia: 2008 Update - Saudi Arabia's curriculum of intolerance

Center for Religious Freedom of Hudson Institute, with the Institute for Gulf Affairs, 89 p. <<http://tinyurl.com/Saud08>>. "This analysis is issued as the deadline nears for the removal of intolerant teachings from all Saudi textbooks. This commitment stems from the Saudi government's

'confirmation' of policies that were publicly announced and lauded as 'significant developments' by the U.S. State Department in July 2006, and are to be implemented in full by the start of the 2008-2009 school year" (:12).

Tajikistan: Analysis of the draft law “About freedom of conscience and religious unions”

By Prof. Robert C. Blitt and Prof. W. Cole Durham, Jr. on behalf of the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, Washington, D.C., January 20, 2008. 64 p. <<http://tinyurl.com/Taji08>>. The proposed draft law has the potential to make significant positive contributions to improving relations between religious communities and the state in the Republic of Tajikistan, but if it is adopted without any further modification, its enforcement will result in the likely violation of fundamental rights.

Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy

TCHRD is a Tibetan NGO that investigates the human rights situation in Tibet and presents this information internationally in various fora. The latest Annual Report for 2007 contains a dedicated section on religious freedom. Visit <www.tchrd.org>.

Specific issues

A Handbook for NGOs

Working with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. [2006?] 135 p. <<http://tinyurl.com/NgoBook>>. This handbook is an important part of the reform strategy of the OHCHR. It aims to provide NGOs with a comprehensive guide to the work of OHCHR, including key information on human rights mechanisms, entry points for NGOs, contact details and links to additional information to help NGOs identify areas of cooperation and partnership with OHCHR. Regular updates on changes at: <www.ohchr.org>.

Handbook on human rights and fundamental freedoms of armed forces personnel

OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), 2008, 251 p. <<http://tinyurl.com/4ehbrc>>. “How can the right to religious freedom (including wearing religious headwear and dress, as well as partaking in religious practices) be integrated in military structures?” Chapter 11 Religion in the armed forces (:87-97): “This chapter examines the practical issues surrounding the recognition of freedom of religion or belief in the armed forces in OSCE participating states. The potential challenges of accommodating religious freedom in general, and religious practices in particular, within the armed forces are discussed. The main

human rights obligations recognizing religious freedom and prohibiting discrimination on grounds of religion are explained.”

New EEOC Compliance Manual on “Religious Discrimination”

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: July 2008, 94 p. <www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/religion.pdf>. “This transmittal covers the issuance of section 12 of the new *Compliance Manual on ‘Religious Discrimination.’* The section provides guidance and instructions for investigating and analysing charges alleging discrimination based on religion.”

Intolerance and discrimination against Muslims

Talking points for the meeting of National Points of Contact on Hate Crimes, Helsinki, 16-17 June 2008, 8 p. <<http://tinyurl.com/musl08>>. - A speech by Ambassador Ömür Orhun, the Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims which deals with Islamophobia, discrimination, hate crime, religious freedom, inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue.

Islam and human rights - defending universality at the United Nations

Center for Inquiry, Amherst, NY, September 2008, 26 p. <<http://tinyurl.com/isla08>>. A humanist, secularist critique of the attempts to undermine the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by introducing specific protection of Islam. In place of religious freedom one of the results would be in effect a prohibition against conversion from Islam: “Islam is the religion of unspoiled nature. It is prohibited to exercise any form of compulsion on man or to exploit his poverty or ignorance in order to convert him to another religion or to atheism” (:6).

The Researcher

The Researcher is published three times a year by the Refugee Documentation Centre (RDC) in Ireland. It is a publication which combines academic papers, summaries of case law, guides to new legislation, reports of conferences, articles on RDC services and items of country of origin information. <www.ecoi.net/news/56.november-2008-issue-of-the-researcher.htm>.

Book reviews

Boyd-MacMillan, Ronald: Faith that endures. The essential guide to the persecuted church. Lancaster: Sovereign World/ Grand Rapids: Revell, 2006, 364 p., UK-ISBN 1 85240 449 3, US-ISBN 978-0-8007-3119-9, Lb 11.99, US\$ 14.99.

This book holds true to its title: It is indeed an essential guide to the persecuted church and it facilitates an encounter with the persecuted believers. The author has been visiting and reporting on persecuted Christians for more than 25 years. His degrees in political science and theology as well as his training as a journalist enable him to process his rich experience and thorough research, turning it into the currently best and most comprehensive handbook on facts, background and complexity of persecution of Christians today. In his quest he is guided by five questions:

1. What does contemporary persecution look like? Those who give their lives for their faith form only the tip of the iceberg. They are being killed by people who want to save their god, criminal syndicate or honour by doing so. The histories of martyrs are dramatic – but for each of them there are thousands of Christians who are suffering alive. Using India as an example the author explains a recurring pattern: A power vacuum is exploited by extremists to move into centres of power. Lies are spread and repeated until they are believed. Mobs are incited to spread chaos in order to cower the opposition. Every single act of persecution usually has multiple causes: Ideology, government, family, culture, church (!), corrupt individuals, and 'over-boldness' of Christians.

2. What is persecution? From a legal perspective five essential rights constitute religious liberty today: The right to believe your religion, to practice, spread, or change it, and to pass it on to one's children or dependants. Taking into account all cases where any of these rights are denied, more than a third of the world's Christians are persecuted. If one wishes to reserve the word persecution for 'gross violations', there are still 200-250 million Christians exposed to it. However a legal definition is inadequate to fully grasp the spiritual reality, which necessitates an encompassing theological definition: Persecution of Christians is “any hostility, experienced from the world, as a result of one's identification with Christ. This can include hostile feelings, attitudes, words, and actions.”

3. Where is the persecuted church? The four global engines of persecution today are religious nationalism, Islamic extremism, totalitarian insecurity, and secular intolerance. Religious nationalism exists where a particular territory or culture is staked out exclusively in religious terms. Christians are degraded to second-class citizens facing daily discrimination,

or worse, they may have to flee. Islamic extremism has different dynamics, as it has a pan-national vision, which strives to incorporate the whole world into Islam. In a totalitarian state, political leaders are trying to control every aspect of life. Where Christians refuse to be dominated, they are seen as a threat and persecuted. Secular intolerance is a growing and so far underestimated source of persecution, which tries to limit evangelistic religions in the name of tolerance. The author gives the readers a global survey in this most extensive section of the book, differentiating by region and picking in each region two 'countries to watch' concerning the future development of religious freedom. These are: Columbia, Mexico, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Eritrea, China, Sri Lanka, France and the USA. This is complemented by inserted case studies on individuals.

4. How do we help the persecuted? According to Boyd-MacMillan, helping the persecuted is messy, controversial, and confusing. Without the proper care more harm than good might be done. He criticises overheated publicity and exaggeration, polarising disputes on tactics, parroting of government propaganda by foreign visitors, and a concentration on the urgent rather than the strategic. He then assesses seven methods of intervention and when these are best suited. Prayer and intercession are always in order and the first help desired by the persecuted. It should be focussed on the establishment of the kingdom of God. Publishing the truth about the persecuted church in general is usually always called for, to speak out on behalf of persecuted individuals requires great sensitivity. Private representation, particularly by influential individuals, usually happens quietly, while letters of encouragement to prisoners and letters of protest to persecutors also make a difference. The use of legal intervention provides ammunition for publicity, has an embarrassing effect for the persecutors, and empowers Christians to stand up for their rights. Illegal intervention, such as smuggling bibles or sneaking endangered people out of a country are necessary when no legal options exist to serve the church. Political pressure from politician to politician or from state to state, while at times having an effect, according to the author, tends to be most overestimated in its value by Christians. Positive engagement by (foreign) Christians in contexts of persecution can eventually result in better treatment for the persecuted but is fraught with pitfalls.

Boyd-MacMillan is very differentiated in his assessment and emphasises that all methods of intervention have their place and supplement each other. The key factor that binds them together in effectiveness is a trustworthy relationship with the persecuted church itself. Further, the author is assisting willing donors with criteria to choose agencies worth supporting: Do they give an opportunity to encounter the persecuted? Do

they make prayer an absolute priority? Do they have sound accountability structures? Is there a willingness to work in coalitions? Are long-term causes of persecution addressed? Is there an awareness of the complexity and the challenges? Do they have a good track record? Do they get into (enough) trouble and how do they behave when criticised?

5. What can we learn from the persecuted? An important lesson for the author is that more strongly persecuted Christians have something to give to the body of Christ. Christians with a greater degree of freedom are challenged by three questions: Am I walking the way of the cross? Am I in enough trouble for Jesus? Is my God big enough?

Ronald Boyd-MacMillan is writer-at-large for Open Doors, co-founded News Network International in 1987 and worked as its Asia bureau chief until 1991 and later became the Asia bureau chief for Compass Direct (1996-2002). His book is the best and most comprehensive popular treatise on the issues surrounding religious freedom and persecution of Christians from an evangelical perspective.

Dr Christof Sauer, Cape Town, South Africa

Johnson, Thomas K: Human Rights - A Christian Primer. (The WEA Global Issues Series 1). Bonn: Culture and Science Publishing, 2008, 112 p., ISBN 978-3-938116-61-6, € 12,00.

This small book is the first in a series of books in the recently started WEA Global Issues series. Johnson's text is a good start. It is, as the title suggests, a primer on a Christian view of human rights. This is a study close to my own heart, as an activist and theologian working with and on behalf of persecuted Christians around the world. When I began my own study on the subject several years ago, I found very little written on the subject, especially from an evangelical perspective. This scarcity of resources has been remedied to some degree in recent years, but Johnson's book fills a particular niche of being a primer or an introduction, while also dealing with the subject really quite satisfactorily.

Rightly grounding the basis of human rights on the fact that all humans are created in the image of God, Johnson examines quite effectively what exactly rights are and what they are not. This is an important study in a day when preferences are often considered to be 'rights' in popular culture. His chapter on 'Rights, Religions, and Ideologies' was, I believe, the strongest part of the study. He carefully notes how only a Christian world view of humanity (both fallen and created in the divine image) provides an adequate basis for defending the dignity of human life. What I think would strengthen this primer even more, however, would be further development on the implications of being created in the image of the

Triune God for human rights. This is something that I have studied at length in my research and believe is an aspect of the study on human rights that is often lacking in other studies.

All in all, I would say that this is the best study on the subject that I have yet read and highly recommend it, especially to university or college students.

Glenn M Penner; Mississauga, Ontario, Canada

Manji, Irshad: The trouble with Islam - A wake-up call for honesty and change. Edinburgh/London 2004/2005, 254 p., \$ 22,95.

An amazing book! It starts with an open letter to Muslims and Irshad Manji's honest confession about her struggles with Islam. In spite of calling herself a Muslim *refusenik* (www.muslim-refusenik.com) she does not desire to leave Islam; but neither is she prepared to close her eyes to the problems and troubles with Islam. Dr. Manji's doctorate is in sociology. She is a well-known TV journalist in Canada, a feminist and an openly confessed lesbian. Her father is Indian, her mother Egyptian. She was born in Uganda, but her family was expelled by the Ugandan dictator Idi Amin.

She says she studied the Qur'an and Muslim beliefs for the last 20 years and is convinced that Islam has to change if it wants to receive a hearing from the younger generation. Her basic proposition is that Islam has to return to the concept of *ijtihad*, to independent and honest thinking, away from rigid dogmatism, away from its obsession to glorify the days of Muhammad.

She describes her long pilgrimage in studying Islam, reading far and wide, discussing issues with her Muslim, Christian and Jewish friends, asking provocative questions, travelling to Arab countries and to Israel, unwilling to accept pet answers or to be satisfied with taboos and traditions. Her aim is to reform and modernise Islam. Her campaign *Operation Ijtihad* is her attempt to achieve this goal. Her book is a call to intellectual honesty, openness and tolerance.

She clearly and without mincing words describes the issues she feels need to be tackled by the Muslim community and those which need to be changed: the oppression and discrimination of women, the rejection of independent, open-minded thinking, the misguided desire to live in the same way as Muhammad, the rejection of the universal human rights, the discrimination of religious minorities in Muslim countries, anti-Semitism and the hatred of Israel which poisons every new generation from early childhood onwards, *jihad* and anti-western hatred. Her aim in this all is to stimulate discussion among the silent majority. She also believes that an essential part of her campaign is to free Muslim women from their financial

dependency in which Dr. Manji sees the conceptual and institutionalised reason for the oppression and discrimination of Muslim women.

The book makes exciting reading. Dr. Manji's conclusions are based on wide reading and well researched facts. Quoted websites and literature are helpful. She invites discussion. Her assessment and conclusions seem honest and fair. I have not found a single typing error in the book – certainly a sign of thoroughness.

The book has been published in almost 30 countries and languages. Some translations are available on Irshad Manji's website free of charge (www.irshadmanji.com). Her website also provides information on all sources for the facts she quotes and lists also positive and negative letters to her and *fatwas* against her.

At the end one wonders how long she will be able to survive all threats on her life and the fatwas against her. The Canadian police and Salman Rushdie advised her to take certain precautions – but how effective will they be in the case of someone who is dead serious in killing her in order to protect the honour of Islam and Muhammad?

Dr Dietrich Kuhl, Essen, Germany

Tieszen, Charles L: Re-Examining Religious Persecution: Constructing a Theological Framework for Understanding Persecution. (Religious Freedom Series 1). Johannesburg: AcadSA Publishing. 2008, 92 p., ISBN 1995-011X, R 90.

This book attempts to redefine the religious persecution of Christians by thoroughly examining it within a theological framework. First Tieszen deals with a number of misconceptions that confuse the issue, such as narrowing it to certain periods in history or geographical regions. He then develops definitions on three levels, starting with persecution in general and moving to religious persecution from a sociological perspective. He rightly notes that socio-political definitions, while having the benefit of being quantifiable, are too narrow to include the full reality that all followers of Jesus must expect to be persecuted. Tieszen therefore insists on the necessity of a theological definition of the religious persecution of Christians, which must be broad enough to also include mild levels of hostility and harm that are not necessarily infringements of human rights. This he develops in a lot of detail, finally boiling it down to the brief definition: "Any unjust action of varying levels of hostility perpetrated primarily on the basis of religion and directed at Christians, resulting in varying levels of harm as it is considered from the victim's perspective."

In a further chapter Tieszen discusses theological questions, such as why persecution occurs, and what the sources and reasons of persecution are. He highlights that persecution is allowed and appointed by God as a part of

God's plan. "Persecution is ultimately God's direction in a given context" (p. 78) though Satan is the source of persecution. Finally Tieszen deals with four potential responses to persecution: enduring it; avoiding it; resisting it; and showing solidarity with the persecuted. Different responses might be called for in different situations.

I consider this book an informative and thought provoking contribution that enriches the thinking about persecution. It helps Christians to understand the basic meaning of religious persecution as well as to reflect theologically on the different contexts. I recommend it to all libraries of theological institutions and mission agencies. It is a useful guideline, especially for Christian ministers who are looking for appropriate answers in responding to the religious persecution of other Christians, and also to develop a proper response to persecution in a given context.

Dr Byeong Hei Jun, Cape Town, South Africa

Schirmacher, Thomas: May a Christian Go to Court and other Essays on Persecution vs. Religious Freedom. (The WEA Global Issues Series 3). Bonn: Culture and Science Publ. 2008, 112 p., ISBN 978-3-938116-63-0, € 12,00.

The most important essay in this collection in my opinion is the Evangelical contribution to a code of Ethics for Christian witness, which is pursued together with the Christian world community, particularly the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. Other important pieces include an argument why involvement in the cause of religious freedom should be a central political issue for everybody, a dictionary article on persecution and mission, and reflections on the relationship between human rights and Christian faith. This is complemented by some wider ethical considerations, debating the Christian misconception that a Christian may not go to court, advising how to put rumours within the church to rest, and arguing for the need of a social ethic, and some press releases pertaining to Turkey. All of this has been previously published elsewhere either in English or in German, but it is useful to have it all in one volume.

Dr Christof Sauer, Cape Town, South Africa

Schirmacher, Thomas: Christenverfolgung heute - Die vergessenen Märtyrer. Holzgerlingen: SCM Hänssler 2008, 96 p., ISBN 978-3-7751-4908-2, € 6,95.

This is a short but highly knowledgeable introductory volume into the topic of the persecution of Christians today. It gives the basic facts, discusses controversial issues and offers practical suggestions for churches, individuals and politicians, and a good list of information sources. A number of answers are given to the question why Christians and Evangelicals in particular face so much persecution. The author discusses the right to change one's religion, unethical means of conversion, the right

to publicly expressing one's opinion which includes the right to peaceful mission activity. He also offers a theological interpretation of persecution in the light of the Bible, discussing the role of the martyrs, the effects of persecution, persecution effected by Christians on others, and the encouragement given by scripture. Schirmacher, who is Director of the IIRF and Speaker of the WEA for Human Rights, has succeeded in presenting a concise and very useful introduction to the topic in German.

Dr Christof Sauer, Cape Town, South Africa

Cherian, M Thomas: Hindutva agenda and minority rights - A Christian response. Study of Hindu fundamentalism and its impact on secularism in India from 1947-1997. (Studies in the Gospel Interface with Indian Contexts, 8). Bangalore: Centre for Contemporary Christianity 2007, 359 p., Pb US\$25, Hb US\$30 (International distribution: help@mergingcurrents.com).

In the fifty years after independence, instead of a growth in communal harmony and national integration throughout India, there developed a tendency to factionalize and politicize religious identities and to exploit spirituality to divisive ends. Whereas the constitution promised liberty for all to practice and propagate their faiths, the insistence to demand India to become Hindu Rashtra was intensified by forces which were negative towards the pluralism that existed in the country. The concept of 'secular democracy' was not properly understood and its outworking suffered much hindrances. Ideological confusions were flaunted by forces that steadily developed superstructures to the extent of capturing political power and governance at the State and Central levels.

Christian Mission continued to work in independent India with native mission agencies taking their role to spread its witness all across the land, both in the urban and the predominantly rural, interior and hill settings. Numerous indigenous mission societies were born at the initiative of charismatic individuals and groups. Their missionaries went as Servants of the Cross and established their churches and developed people. The public was happy with the medical, educational and relief activities of Christian missions. Though many benefited from these service ventures of Christian community, only few resolved to follow Jesus Christ and to join the church community. It was not a considerable number. Yet even the small number of conversions caused anxiety to the majority community. Hence, the earlier claim of tolerance was superseded by a militant agitation and anguish as leadership and structures emerged with a blind following by unlearned and misguided common folk. Even well placed political and religious leaders used this in blind fury. While the leadership in the nation tried to promote secular democracy, the militant hindutva brigade committed itself to the promotion of hindu rashtra. This meant a disowning of the non-hindus; and

this worked its way in many situations through the decades. The Muslims were targeted from the time of partition. Later the Sikhs were the attacked and hunted community. The third minority group under surveillance is the Christian community. It is of great urgency that the Christian community should understand the developments and the roots and ramifications of the attacks on them, in order to be prepared for both self defence as well as healing ministry.

Some popular writings have come about in response to the attacks. But clear and systematic study of an academic nature are few and insufficient. CV Mathew's book *The Saffron Mission* deals with the Hindutva movement and its history and concepts. We need further help. Hence, M Thomas Cherian has undertaken to study this area for his doctoral research with the South Asia Theological Research Institute (SATHRI) of the Senate of Serampore College.

M Thomas Cherian studies the way the hindutva agitation rose and formalized itself into religious and political structures. He interprets what secularism could have meant and indicates how fundamentalist mindset took predominance and grew to hurt peaceful co-existence. In the very introduction, he says:

Independent India unlike earlier, has witnessed an unprecedented growth of religious fundamentalism. ...religious violence and communal riots are frequent occurrences in modern India. Religiously-oriented political parties have tended to capture power in the states and at the centre, to subdue minorities, and even to attack the worship places of the minority communities. (p.1)

Cherian raises the question: "Why do these things happen in a secular democratic country like India...?" and goes on to study the roots of this trend.

Not a day goes by without a report from some part or the other in the nation of attacks on Christian pastors, nuns, institutions and churches. Religious persecution is rampant and there is fear in the minds of those working in pioneer settings. It is not confined to remote rural sectors but are often reported from urban cities as well. What started out in the less Christian Northern States as persecution of Christians has steadily become common all over the nation, including Kerala where the Christian number is high. How should Christians respond to these attacks? How should they safeguard themselves and their interest? How should they share the goodnews of God's love in Christ to their Hindu and other neighbours?

Cherian investigates the birth, growth and affect of the fundamentalist and militant trend in the Hindutva movement and attempts to propose how the church ought to respond to it. 'Minority Rights' is at the heart of the investigation of Cherian. He defines the minority and the rationale for their rights

as citizens in a secular democracy, wherein freedom of religion is a constitutional privilege of every citizen. Citing Articles 25 and 26 he establishes the fact that the right to change of faith is a fundamental right of a citizen.

Cherian suggests that “Public theology emerging through an inter-community dialogue” should be “taken as a viable model of theological response of the church in India towards the growing religious, especially Hindu, fundamentalism in India” (p.6). Such public theology to him “emerges from discourse, debate and dialogue within the common public, and it is from the every day life of the public of the civil society. In this debate and dialogue, it is not the religious leaders alone coming together to discuss the matters but the common public engaged in various streams of life from the common working class to the upper class people brought together in discussion of matters related in the every day life” (pp.307-308). Hence, the call of Cherian is to the total church – the clergy and the laity together to develop that sort of an interaction which will develop a public theology which will enable Christian mission to relate with the fundamentalist trends of the other religious communities and to be able to impact them with that goodnews that intends to love and transform all humanity in the new man Jesus Christ.

He concludes saying:

The Church in India, in the context of violation of the minority rights can take the lead in bringing together various communities of people for a dialogue and discussion on the disturbing questions of life. The basic aim of this discussion is to find ways to live together harmoniously without religious violence and the violation of the rights of the religious minorities. *These inter-community dialogue and discussions can lead to the formulation of a public theology that is a theology emerging from, for and by the civil people, the common people.* (pp.310-311)

This study clarifies to us the meaning of a secular state, secularism, constitutional democracy and fundamental rights and helps us to develop perspectives on how we ought to understand our role in the public sphere as those who shall enable the political process to safeguard the rights of the minorities and protect a continued secular state, where all religions shall enjoy freedom of exercise and expression. This is a timely study and a positive input to our understanding of mission in plural settings.

Siga Arles, PhD, Bangalore, India

Readers' response

The editors received among others the following encouraging comments after the publication of the first International Journal for Religious Freedom:

Re: IJRF 1:1

Thank you for coming up with such a wonderful journal that addresses pertinent issues concerning religious activities. I am greatly impressed by the fact that your journal is very informative as it draws from other disciplines. Please keep up the good work.

(Dr MM Kanjere, Senior lecturer and Head of Department (Educational Management Sciences), University of Limpopo, South Africa, E-mail: mariak@ul.ac.za)

Re: CL Tieszen, Towards redefining persecution, IJRF 1:1,67-80

This is a well theorized article, ably supported by brief references to contextual arguments and case studies. The core of his argument takes the shape of firstly defining persecution in the broadest sense, before narrowing it down in terms of religion and theology. He then explores avenues for the universal prevalence of persecution (even in secular societies) and its contextual experience.

His line of reasoning in support of a theological scrutiny is especially insightful when he deals with the mutation from genocide at the level of socio-political definitions (or "death" if one were to employ fairly value-free discourse) to martyrdom at the level of theological definitions. The implication is that this phenomenon is not the exclusive preserve of any single religious tradition.

When persecutions are examined from a strictly religious science perspective, it will be found that they are endured by followers of all religions from observers of other religions and/or lifestyles as confirmed by this article. However, they may even be experienced from members of the same faith community as occurs between Protestants and Catholics in Christianity, Sunnis and Shias in Islam, Orthodox and Reform Judaism, high and low caste Hindus, and so on. At such a broad level, persecution is indeed part of our human condition regardless of our affiliation to a faith tradition or otherwise. This requires acknowledgement by all people and its eradication to the degree that it is humanly possible.

(Dr Yousuf Dadoo, professor of Islamic Studies and Arabic, Department for Religious Studies and Arabic of the University of South Africa, Pretoria, E-mail: Dadooy@unisa.ac.za)

Call for submissions and instructions to contributors

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

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

Criteria for articles

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

Submission procedure

1. Contributions may be submitted in paper form or by e-mail to:
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2. A statement whether an item is being submitted elsewhere or has been previously published must accompany the article.
3. Research articles will be sent to three independent referees. Upon receiving the reports from the referees, authors will be notified of the decision of the editorial committee, which may include a statement indicating changes or improvements that are required before publication.
4. Should the article be accepted for publication, the author will be expected to submit an electronic version of the article.
5. Include the following:
 - An abstract of no more than 100 words.
 - Between 3 and 10 keywords that express the key theological concepts used in the article.
 - Brief biographical details of the author in the first footnote, linked to the name of the author, indicating, among others, year of birth, the institutional affiliation, special connection to the topic, and e-mail address.
6. Contributors will be informed if their article is not accepted for publication, but a hard copy will not be returned to them.
7. Articles should be spell-checked before submission, by using the 'UK English' dictionary of the word processor. Delete all double spaces and blank lines. Use as little formatting as possible and definitely no "hard formatting" such as extra spaces, tabs. All entries in the references and all footnotes end with a full stop. No blank spaces before a line break.
8. Research articles should have a minimum length of 5 000 words. Articles longer than 10 000 words are not normally accepted, but a submission longer than that may be published if, in the views of the referees, it makes an important contribution to religious freedom.
9. Research articles are honoured with two complimentary printed copies.

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1. *IJRF* follows the widely accepted ‘name-date’ method (or Harvard system) for citations in the text.
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3. Graphics (e.g. graphs, tables, photographs) will only be included in an article if they are essential to understanding the text. Graphics should not be included in the body of the article. Number graphics consecutively, save each in a separate file and indicate clearly in the text where each should be placed.
4. Footnotes should be reserved for content notes only. Bibliographical information is cited in the text according to the Harvard method (see 2 above). Full citations should appear in the References at the end of the article (see below).
5. References should be listed in alphabetical order of authors under the heading *References* at the end of the text. Do not include a complete bibliography of all works consulted, only a list of references actually used in the text.
6. Always give full first names of authors in the list of references, as this simplifies the retrieval of entries in databases.

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As the *Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg/Germany* (ELCW) we appreciate the important role the *IIRF* plays in dealing with the challenge of persecution and religious liberty on the basis of thorough scholarly research on the high level of academic theology. The specific theological focus of the upcoming consultation will signify a remarkable progress in this ministry – for the benefit of the global church in mission!

Rev. Canon Fritz Würschum, Mission Secretary of the ELCW

In my global travels, I encounter persecution and religious liberty issues as a prime challenge to the Christian church. The World Evangelical Alliance and the 420 million Christians it represents, welcome that the issue is examined theologically.

Dr Geoff Tunnicliffe, International Director, World Evangelical Alliance