

# 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.

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

**IJRF is freely available on the web a few weeks after publication: [www.iirf.eu](http://www.iirf.eu)**

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# International Journal for Religious Freedom

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### *To the participants*

of the World Evangelical Fellowship General Assembly, October 25-30, 2008

The team of the International Institute for Religious Freedom gives you greetings and hopes to meet you at our exhibition stand.

Our mission is to strengthen all efforts for religious freedom through research and publications. We particularly support the WEA Religious Liberty Commission and National Evangelical Alliances.

We hope that you will find the International Journal for Religious Freedom helpful. Please advertise it in your context to academics, leaders and politicians as you deem appropriate.

The IJRF is freely available online at [www.iirf.eu](http://www.iirf.eu).

For religious freedom

*Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirmacher*

*Director*

# Editorial

## Introducing the International Journal for Religious Freedom

The International Journal for Religious Freedom (*IJRF*) 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 journal, serving the practical interests of religious freedom and contains research articles, documentation, book reviews and academic news on the issue.

Religious freedom is understood as the freedom to exercise any or no religion as defined by the relevant declarations of the United Nations. From a human rights perspective, restrictions of religious freedom and religious persecution are understood as denying anyone the rights connected with practising one's religion, and the denying of rights because of the religious beliefs of those who are persecuted and/or those who persecute. The right to religious freedom is indivisible and cannot be claimed for one particular group only at the exclusion of others. In this sense, this journal is dedicated to religious freedom in general.

Owing to the fact that Christians are the largest single group persecuted globally – an estimated 75% of those persecuted for their religious beliefs – and that the editors are themselves Christians, this journal has a particular interest in the religious freedom of Christians. This adds a theological and pastoral perspective to various other disciplines such as law, politics, philosophy and sociology from which religious freedom can be examined in a scholarly way.

This journal, therefore, is interdisciplinary and scholarly, serving the practical interests of religious freedom. Before acceptance into this journal, all academic contributions undergo scholarly peer review according to the criteria acceptable in academia worldwide. Original contributions are accepted from all academic disciplines. Non-academic pieces are welcome if they are well substantiated and have verifiable sources. These are not necessarily peer reviewed.

As this journal is international, expect to find original contributions from authors who might also be supplying first-hand news material and documentation to advocacy agencies concerned with religious freedom. We aim to include contributions from around the globe and to avoid bias and parochialism. We therefore hope to include

more contributions from the majority world and from women authors in future issues than is the case in this one. The *IJRF* is also international in the sense that it tries to supply an international readership with the best contributions on religious freedom published elsewhere. So there will be the occasional reprints and lots of referrals to noteworthy material, and, hopefully, an increasing number of book reviews.

The *IJRF* is the journal of the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) of the World Evangelical Alliance. The IIRF has bureaus in Bonn, Cape Town and Colombo. The World Evangelical Alliance represents a constituency of around 420 million Christians. On their behalf the IIRF also keeps close contact with the World Council of Churches and the Vatican regarding religious freedom issues. The directors of the IIRF are at the same time the editors of the International Journal for Religious Freedom. Prof Dr Thomas Schirrmacher lives in Bonn, Germany, and is also the director of Martin Bucer Seminary. Dr Christof Sauer lives in Cape Town, South Africa, and is associated with the University of South Africa. Both are introduced in more detail in their contributions to this issue. The International Academic Board of the IIRF serves as Board of Reference for the *IJRF*. The journal is produced by the Cape Town Bureau of the IIRF.

It gives us great pleasure to welcome Drs Mirjam Scarborough as the Executive Editor of the *IJRF*, who co-ordinates the editorial work of the journal and has competently ensured that this issue has been produced on time. She is also the Co-Director of the IIRF Cape Town Bureau and is pursuing an oral history project on persecuted Christians in the majority world, besides sharing a pastorate with her husband at a church in Cape Town. We further thank the referees who have evaluated and helped to improve the contributions in this issue. As good academic practice requires, they remain anonymous while, equally, not being told the name of the author of the article they are reviewing. We are most grateful to Drs Manfred Jung of AcadSA Publishing in Kempton Park, Johannesburg, for his helpful advice on the technical aspects of the journal and for publishing it.

## Contributions in this issue

*IJRF* editor and IIRF director Thomas Schirrmacher opens with an opinion piece, arguing that defending the religious freedom of Christians benefits all. This is the substance of a lecture presented on

different occasions to German parliamentarians and to members of a political party, urging them to make religious freedom a central issue in policy making and on their political agenda. We are looking forward to other contributions with a similar focus in the column *In my Opinion*.

The programmatic opening of *Academic Articles* consists of IJRF editor and IIRF co-director Christof Sauer's survey of existing research on persecution and martyrdom and some important issues requiring research. While only addressing a sub-topic of the journal, he tries to present some of the scope in which the *IJRF* hopes to operate by pointing to various academic disciplines. While the other academic articles are theological in nature, this will not be the sole characteristic of future issues.

However, the publication of this issue coincides with the quintennial General Assembly of the World Evangelical Alliance in Pattaya, Thailand in October 2008. So one of the criteria guiding our selection of articles for this issue was the benefit to the delegates from national Evangelical Alliances around the globe and their constituencies.

Christians take their orientation and inner motivation from the Bible. We have therefore won the author of the most extensive biblical theology of persecution and discipleship known to us for a series on the topic. In this issue, Glenn Penner, who is also a member of the Academic Board of the International Institute for Religious Freedom, covers the Pentateuch. Next, Charles Tieszen, who has made the most thorough study on re-defining persecution from a theological perspective, contributes to the main academic articles with the first part of a mini-series.

In the category *Research in Progress*, Asaf Augusto presents the Master of Arts dissertation in church history that he is currently writing on the impact of persecution in the late colonial period on his church in Angola. We would like to invite all researchers and students to send us proposals of their current research or reports on completed work.

*Case Studies* will from time to time focus on religious freedom and persecution in specific countries or areas. This issue features Sri Lanka, not because it has the worst religious freedom record, but because the author, Godfrey Yogarajah, the director of the Colombo Bureau of the International Institute for Religious Freedom and

designated director of the Religious Liberty Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance hails from there. This award-winning religious freedom activist gives a first-hand impression of the typical progression of persecution from disinformation via discrimination to destruction, and of church growth in such circumstances. His analysis, based on decades of documentation, is complemented by the country profile on Sri Lanka from the leading researcher Paul A Marshall's book on religious freedom in the world. Expect to hear more from him in the *IJRF* in future, as he is also a member of the Academic Board of the IIRF. As an example of how a national Evangelical Alliance tries to advance religious freedom, we are documenting relevant sections of the website of the National Christian Evangelical Alliance in Sri Lanka.

The general *Documentation* section, which does not require peer review, presents the current 'Religious Liberty Trends', issued annually by the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission (RLC), authored by the research writer of the IIRF and the RLC, Elizabeth Kendal. In addition we feature 'guidelines on reporting for publicity and advocacy', in our effort to support best practice in this regard. It also reflects the standards required by the *IJRF* for accepting documentation on persecution.

The *Noteworthy* section points to findings and reports published elsewhere. The editors invite all researchers and organizations to proactively keep us up to date about their latest news and output. We currently include what we came across in our research but we would like this section to turn into a vibrant market place of information sharing. Please indicate whether material you submit is for publication or for background information of the editors only.

*Book Reviews* are a standard feature of any academic journal, and we would very much like to develop this section in the *IJRF*. Publishers may submit their books and other publications for review. We will regularly publish a list of material received and decide whether we want to review that particular title. We also welcome unsolicited reviews which will be published on a basis of quality and currency. Equally, we would like to build a list of volunteer reviewers.

In closing, you will find a *Call for submission of articles and instructions to contributors*, as well as a preview of articles already in store for future issues.



## Religious Freedom Series

The journal is complemented by the Religious Freedom Series, a publishing channel designed for more extensive works on religious freedom issues. This includes academic theses, solidly researched documentation, legal expertise, country profiles and case studies, declarations and documents of practical relevance, conference proceedings, topical collections, curricula, textbooks, bibliographies, statistics and reprints. See the advertisement at the back.

## Invitation to subscribe and contribute

The *International Journal for Religious Freedom* is freely available online at <[www.iirf.eu](http://www.iirf.eu)> a few weeks after publication. You can also register on that site, to receive the full electronic issues as soon as they become available, or to receive a reminder to your email address. For those who want to read and collect the journal on paper, paid subscription is available. May we request that you kindly recommend the journal to academic libraries for subscription. (See the order form at the back.) Bulk copies for purchase can be produced on request.

Readers are invited to submit or suggest articles and information or to request the inclusion of certain topics in line with the character of the journal. Please note the instructions to contributors at the back, and a fuller version thereof on the website. Volunteers for book reviews are very welcome.

While making the *IJRF* freely available, the International Institute for Religious Freedom is dependent on donations and sponsorship to fulfil its mission. Any contributions are welcome and can be made through the channels listed in the imprint and via other channels on request.

We are happy to exchange copies with other journals and can offer the electronic version of ours.

The *IJRF* will for the time being appear twice a year. We would value your comments on this first issue, and would like to publish *Readers' Responses* in the next issue.

For religious freedom

*Prof Dr mult Thomas Schirrmacher*  
*Dr Christof Sauer*  
*(editors)*

## In upcoming issues

- *B Konutgan*: Turkey case study
- *M Scarborough*: Persecution and the missionary call. A case study of Mennonite women in mission in Africa
- *NN*: The WEA Religious Liberty Commission
- *NN*: The Religious Liberty Partnership
- *T Schirrmacher*: ‘But with gentleness and respect.’ An evangelical perspective on a code of ethics for Christian witness
- *C Sauer*: Researching persecution and martyrdom: Part 2. The internal perspective
- *G Penner*: A biblical theology of persecution and discipleship: Part 2. Insights from the historical books and the prophets
- *C Tieszen*: “Agonizing for you”: Christian responses to religious persecution
- *E Kendal*: Current Issues

# Introducing the International Institute for Religious Freedom

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

These include :

1. Dissemination of existing literature, information about archives, compilation of bibliographies etc.
2. Production and dissemination of new papers, journals and books
3. Gathering and analysis of statistics and stories
4. Supplying of ideas and materials to universities, seminaries and Bible colleges to encourage the inclusion of religious freedom issues into curricula

5. Networking to find, support and involve researchers in the work of IIRF, including the creation of research groups
6. Attendance at key events that provide an opportunity to strengthen connections with the wider religious liberty community and with politicians, diplomats and media with an interest in human rights

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

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- Dr Christof Sauer (Director)
- Drs Mirjam Scarborough (Co-Director)

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# Defending religious freedom of Christians benefits all

Thomas Schirmmacher\*

## Abstract

At least 75% of all religious liberty violations worldwide are committed against Christians. There are many reasons: Christianity is by far the largest religion and phenomenally growing. Countries with a colonial history use traditional religions for identity building and many countries increasingly connect nationalism and religion. Christians often are major advocates for human rights and democracy and endanger well-established connections between religion and industry. The peacefulness of Christian churches invites the use of force against them since no resistance is feared. They are often equated with the hated West and the international nature of Christianity is regarded as a danger. Religious conversion, peaceful missionary work and the public expression of religious convictions must be safeguarded as integral components of religious freedom. By defending religious freedom of Christians, the plight of other persecuted minorities is also brought to attention. Let us promote religious liberty for all people around the world, regardless of religious or ideological affiliation. [CS]

**Keywords** Reasons for persecution, advocacy

At least three-quarters of all religious liberty violations worldwide are committed against Christians. When it comes to the killing of people for their religious beliefs, the rate is probably in excess of 90 percent<sup>1</sup> and the problem is growing.

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\* Thomas Schirmmacher (\*1960) received doctorates in ecumenical theology (Holland), cultural anthropology (USA) and comparative religion (Germany). He is an ethicist and director of Martin Bucer Seminary and, among other positions, Visiting Professor of the Sociology of Religion at Oradea State University (Romania). He is director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom (Bonn/Cape Town/Colombo) of the World Evangelical Alliance and secretary of German and Austrian Evangelical Alliance's Religious Freedom Commission. E-mail: DrThSchirmmacher@bucer.de. The following is based on a lecture originally presented to a commission of the German Parliament (Deutscher Bundestag) on 1 February 2007.

<sup>1</sup> In 1999, when, in an *aktuelle Stunde* (a public debate in German parliamentary procedure used to address issues within a limited time frame), the Bundestag was discussing an inquiry by the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social

The persecution of Christians is not only an issue for Christians, who, according to a central statement of their faith, show solidarity with their suffering fellow believers (“If one part suffers, every part suffers with it” 1 Cor 12,26). Rather, the issue is relevant for everyone who wants to support the cause of religious liberty. Wherever increased religious liberty is achieved for Christians, there is a benefit for all religions and all people.

Being involved in the support of persecuted Christians in Iran and for converts who seek asylum in foreign countries means at the same time to help the Bahá’í, who are also brutally persecuted in Iran. Their cause for religious liberty is far less known around the world, and they have practically no lobby. Whoever helps India and Indonesia remain secular states and not give in to the pressure of religious nationalists is at the same time supporting adherents of all religions. As far as India and Indonesia are concerned, only Christians have at their disposal the infrastructure to publicise the human rights situation in these countries for the benefit of those living there and internationally.

Involvement in the struggle for human rights for Christians often directly helps a country’s adherents of dominating religious majorities. Involvement for the sake of converts to Christianity from Islam in Afghanistan, for example, draws worldwide attention to the fate of many Buddhists and Muslims in that country. Only by involvement in the cause against the difficult situation of Philippine Roman Catholics in Saudi Arabia is attention also drawn to the suffering of Philippine Muslims in Saudi Arabia. For instance, the religious police in Saudi Arabia persecute adherents of other schools of Islamic law because they pray at the wrong times. Those who were to try to pray in Saudi Arabia at the wrong time would find themselves in jail as fast as if they had displayed a cross somewhere. Sunni Islam has four different

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Union faction into the question of persecution of Christians, the German Federal Government officially replied that it was incorrect to say that the persecution of Christians was on the rise. Rather, the government claimed, it had remained the same, except for the cases of India and Indonesia. This is basically correct. However, it is to be noted that India and Indonesia together account for one-quarter of the world’s population, and, in contrast to twenty years ago when Christians were never killed for religious reasons in these countries, such occurrences nowadays are the order of the day. If the persecution of Christians remains the same on three-quarters of the globe and in one-quarter of the world it is increasing, then there is an overall increase in the persecution of Christians.

schools of law and four different understandings of prayer times. Prayer in Saudi Arabia is allowed only at those times prescribed by the Hanbalitic School of Law as accepted by the Wahabis. Adherents of the other three Sunni Schools of Law, as well as those adhering to the Shi'ite School of Law, are persecuted.

The worldwide Christian legal association, Advocates International, is associated with the World Evangelical Alliance. Advocates International works for the cause of persecuted adherents of different religions. For example, it is involved at the forefront in various parliaments in the quest for introducing effective laws that advance religious liberty for everyone. The International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church that takes place at the beginning of November every year brings the ideas of religious liberty and peaceful coexistence among all religions to tens of thousands of local church communities and into the hearts of millions of people worldwide. The motto of the Roman Catholic Day of Martyrdom on December 26 (also known as the Feast of St. Stephen) confirms the same thing: "Active involvement for the realisation of global religious liberty is a duty of faith."

The World Evangelical Alliance's Religious Liberty Commission has on numerous occasions become involved in peace discussions among other religions. It also reports regularly on violence against adherents of all religions via its global network aimed at the media and parliamentarians. Various confessions have similar global organisations. Such international commissions usually consist of affected members who have a very strong interest in seeing that their own countries – and not only Christians but *all* inhabitants – live in peace, freedom, and security. These indigenous Christians remind us that one should not see religious persecution and persecution of Christians only within the context of one's popular enemies.

Politicians and the states that they represent should be involved in the cause of persecuted Christians, for Christians, apart from a few exceptions, consistently support the separation of church and state and thereby support the notion of a state monopoly on the use of force. In doing so, Christians simultaneously give up the possibility of protecting themselves against violence and persecution. Such a situation can only work as long as the state uses its monopoly on the use of force to protect Christians against others who do not accept this monopoly, but rather view private force as a legitimate means in religious strife.

## Why are Christians persecuted so much?

It is important to realise that reasons for the persecution of Christians are complex, and most often not purely religious. Political, cultural, nationalistic, economic, and personal motives can play an important role. This is evident in the Old Testament already. In the case of Queen Jezebel, hatred for God and His prophets was mixed with a desire for power as well as with unmitigated attempts at personal enrichment (1 Kgs 16-19). In the New Testament, in the book of Revelation, we find that in addition to hatred for the church, there are political and economic reasons involved as well. A further good example is provided by the artisans, goldsmiths and silversmiths of Ephesus (Acts 19:23-29), who perceived a “danger” to their welfare (v. 27) in Paul’s successful proclamation of the gospel, and therefore instigated a riot. The irritation of a slave owner because of lost revenues when a fortune-telling spirit was driven out of a slave led the slave owner to have Paul and Silas taken into custody (Acts 16:16-24). We should always be aware of the fact that there is often no pure motive for the persecution of Christians or for the restriction of religious liberty, but rather that persecution is caused through an entanglement with existing problems of the respective culture and society.

It is important to note that if an adherent of a hated religion or if an individual with a hated skin colour is tortured, one should neither play down the racism involved by claiming that in reality there is a religious component at work, nor vice versa. Racism and religious hatred are both detestable, and if they occur simultaneously, they have to be fought on both fronts.

In spite of this qualification, let us return to the question of why Christians are so often affected, and far above the average, by restrictions of religious liberty.

*1. Christianity is far and away the largest religion in the world. For that reason, human rights violations relating to religious affiliation are most common among Christians.*

*2. Christianity is experiencing phenomenal growth around the world, in particular in its evangelical form. This increasingly threatens the position of leading religions in numerous countries.*

There is increasing competition between the two largest world religions, Christianity and Islam, and this is occurring at the expense



of other religions.<sup>2</sup> However, regarding the content of its message, Islam has historically been opposed to Christianity. This is a confrontation that never occurred between Islam and Buddhism. Christianity has adapted to this challenge over the past 1400 years, and in this respect, the confrontation carries a considerable amount of unnecessary baggage.

	<b>Adherents 2006</b>	<b>Growth in %</b>	<b>Estimate for 2025</b>
<b>World Population</b>	6,529,426,000	1.22	7,851,455,000
<b>Christians</b>	2,156,350,000	1.25	2,630,559,000
<b>Muslims</b>	1,339,392,000	1.9	1,861,360,000
<b>Hindus</b>	877,552,000	1.38	1,031,168,000
<b>Non-Religious</b>	772,497,000	0.23	817,091,000
<b>Chinese Universalists</b>	406,233,000	0.65	431,956,000
<b>Buddhists</b>	382,482,000	0.9	459,448,000
<b>Tribal Religions</b>	257,009,000	1.21	270,210,000
<b>Atheists</b>	151,628,000	0.49	151,742,000
<b>New Religions</b>	108,794,000	0.78	122,188,000
<b>Sikhs</b>	25,673,000	1.48	31,985,000
<b>Jews</b>	15,351,000	0.92	16,895,000

Only the three largest world religions are presently growing faster than the world population. The world population is expanding at a rate of 1.22%. Hinduism is growing at a rate of 1.38%, primarily because births are exceeding deaths. Islam is growing at 1.9% for the same reason, as well as because of economic and political measures and missionary activities. Christianity is growing at a rate of 1.25%, whereas highly missionally active evangelical Christianity is growing

<sup>2</sup> All the following figures are from David Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*. 2 Volumes. Oxford University Press: New York, Oxford, 2001, and from updates in the ecumenical International Bulletin of Missionary Research, available at [www.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/global\\_christianity/IBMR2006.pdf](http://www.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/global_christianity/IBMR2006.pdf). Numbers from other researchers are similar. Numbers referring solely to Evangelicals are the most conservative, as most estimates reflect significantly higher numbers.

at an enormous rate of 2.11%. This development, which is occurring mainly in the majority world is making up for the shrinking of Christianity in the Western hemisphere. A net increase of 5.4 million evangelicals is being added yearly to the currently estimated total of 255 million evangelicals. This translates to a daily increase of 14,800.

The point is neither to welcome this development nor to criticise it, but rather simply to make the observation that growth in non-Western Christianity is at the root of tension worldwide. Christianity has tripled in size in Africa and Asia since 1970. In each of the non-Christian countries of China, India and Indonesia, considerably more people go to church on Sundays than in all of Western Europe combined.

That, of course, leads to all sorts of tensions. In India, for example, Christians have for more than a century made casteless education possible. Millions of casteless people have become Christians, because otherwise no one would look after them. According to the constitution, there is to be a certain percentage of casteless people in all state occupations and state authorities. All of a sudden, people realise there are Christians in influential positions everywhere far in excess of their proportion of the overall population in the country. A host of other such examples could be mentioned.

*3. Most non-Christian religions have little success to show in missions, or else they are involved in very little mission activities.* Moreover, they often employ political, economic or social pressure instead of, or in addition to, peaceful attempts at conversion. In recent decades, Christianity has undergone a significant development toward renouncing violence and political and social pressure, while at the same time turning towards more content-oriented conversion work and peaceful missionary efforts.

This becomes clear if we consider the following example. The religious conflict in Northern Ireland, which took place until recently, makes us aware of what used to be the norm for Christianity up to 300 years ago. Today this leaves Christians aghast and is completely rejected. In the meantime, peaceful mission work and selfless social involvement have become the trademarks of Christianity. The number of foreign full-time Christian missionaries worldwide is estimated at 420,000, while the number of full-time church workers is estimated at 5.1 million.

*4. Countries with a colonial history are looking to regain their own identity by recovering traditional religions.* In doing so, they increasingly use legal

means and/or force against “foreign” religions. In India, for example, this conflict occurs in terms of Hinduism versus Islam and Christianity, in Indonesia in terms of Islam versus Christianity and Hindu-Buddhism, and in Sri Lanka and Nepal in terms of Buddhism versus Christianity and Islam.

*5. In many countries we observe an increasing connection between nationalism and religion.*

When one thinks of India, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan alone, one-third of the world population is affected by such conflicts. A similar situation exists in Turkey, where Turks are expected to be Muslims. Turks who become Christians fight in courts for years in order to have their religious affiliation changed on their passports. Christianity in Turkey, as well as in other places, stands in the way of nationalism. After a difficult path, the Christian faith itself has hopefully taken final leave of the connection between nationalism and Christianity. There are exceptions, such as Northern Ireland until recently, and quite a few national orthodox churches which have not followed the lead of other confessions, but they confirm the rule.

*6. Christians have in many instances become vocal and persistent advocates for human rights and democracy.*

The Christian involvement in the cause of the weak and of minorities, which is inherent in its teaching, but which, however, has not always or everywhere been very pronounced, has in many places become the trademark of Christianity. This has resulted in Christians becoming the classical targets of human rights opponents and tyrants in numerous countries of Latin America and in North Korea, mostly because they are seen as organised opponents. Moreover, Christians increasingly have global networks at their disposal, which can often be activated against human rights violations and can produce worldwide reactions in the press.

*7. Closely related is the fact that Christianity often endangers well-established connections between religion and industry.*

Drug bosses in Latin America who are behind the killing of Catholic priests or Baptist pastors, for instance, surely do not do this because they are furthering the cause of an opposing religion. Rather, it is because the church leaders are often the only ones who stand up for native farmers or indigenous people groups standing in the way of Mafia bosses.

*8. The peacefulness of Christian churches, which even often manifests itself as true pacifism, invites the use of force since no resistance is feared.*

On a global stage, for example, Muslims fear American retaliation but not the reaction of indigenous Christians.

Christians who believe in the separation of church and state often demonstrate this in the form of pacifism. Since no resistance is anticipated, Christians become fair game. For instance, I have discussed with church leaders in Indonesia whether they should defend their homes and families against marauding, heavily armed gangs of Jihad militia. Individual Christians have, in certain cases, defended their families with the use of force. Who, living in the secure West can criticise them? Yet, Christian churches have, in the end, agreed on a non-violent approach, sometimes at a price. In Indonesia, incidentally, violence is, for the most part, directed not against Christian missionary activities but rather against 'Christian' (in Indonesia, mainly Catholic) islands on which Christians have for centuries lived undisturbed in their own settlements but which are suddenly being raided by heavily armed militia.

*9. Christians are often equated with the hated West.*

It is evident that the West has for a while no longer been predominantly Christian. MacWorld and pornography, which evoke images of the enemy for many, have actually nothing to do with Christianity. Churches in the Third World nowadays, almost without exception, operate independently of the global North and are under indigenous leadership. Still, indigenous Christians are unable to escape suspicion. Similarly, Turkish Christians are suspected of conducting espionage for the CIA. Chinese Christians are viewed as lackeys of the USA or of the 'Western' Pope, and despite all the Western monetary support, 'Christians' in Palestine are still considered to be agents of Zionism.

*10. The international nature of Christianity is regarded as a danger.*

As Paul wrote, Christians ultimately see themselves as people who, beyond their national citizenship, are bound to all other citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20). According to Jesus, the church understands itself to be multicultural, extending beyond national borders (Matt 28:18). This can be seen as a threat, just like any other major international personal, ideological or financial interconnection. Christian theology has for a long time been internationally oriented, with Christian theologians pursuing an ongoing dialogue with their peers from around the world. This situation is seen by Christians as an enrichment. However, non-Christians often view it as an unpredictable power factor.

The Chinese government 'cannot' and does not want to believe that no third force is directing the millions of evangelicals in house churches in China. Nor can the Chinese government believe the unfortunate fact that these churches often break away from each other on bad terms and go their separate ways. That the Pope only appoints indigenous bishops and does not seek to interfere in China's political affairs is something that the Chinese government similarly 'cannot' and does not want to believe. This in spite of the fact that, in Poland, the Pope recently prohibited the operation of an overly political Catholic radio station. The Chinese government says: A Chinese Catholic church, yes, but one that is subordinate to the Pope, no.

The Chinese government panics at the idea that an influential organisation inside its borders could be run from a foreign country. China has this in common with a lot of other countries. It would therefore be sensible for international politicians to suggest that Asian church leaders meet with Chinese politicians and party members and let them know that the large Asian churches, for instance in India, are not being run from the West. Rather, these churches are completely under indigenous leadership. Initially this suggestion elicits incredulous astonishment from politicians, which is followed by considerable interest.

As a point of criticism, it should be noted that some American Christian mission work, and occasionally that of other countries, can awaken the false impression that there is a sort of worldwide strategy to conquer, emanating from the USA. Since American Christian television technically, and language-wise, reaches the entire world, this can have a frightening effect. Also, when missionary events continue to be called *crusades*, many take the word literally.

## **Religious conversion as an expression of religious liberty**

The classic definition of religious liberty is found in Article 18 of the United Nations' Universal General Declaration on Human Rights:

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.

What does the term religious liberty imply? It is interesting to note that religious liberty, first of all, contains the right to change one's religion and worldview! Religious conversion within Christianity itself, as a result of inner conviction, is the primordial cell or origin of religious liberty. The question is, what do I do, if out of inner conviction, I no longer hold to that which was previously taken for granted or which had been instilled in me?

I have often discussed this with journalists or others who oppose missionary work. They say, for instance, "You can't be surprised if there are problems in Iran when Muslims become Christians. Just leave the Iranians in peace." Then I usually reply, first of all, "In Iran it has been the case for a long time that it is no longer Western missionaries who evangelise but indigenous people. As a result for whatever reasons native Iranians leave Islam for the Bahá'í religion or become Christians. Who wants to go there and prevent that?" And secondly, "Am I to then reinstate in our law books a statement that whoever leaves the church loses his job and has to suffer other civil consequences?" This used to be the case. Religious affiliation and civic life used to be closely related. Anyone who in the past became a Jehovah's Witness, for example, faced a host of civil consequences.

Religious liberty means to uncouple religious affiliation from civil status. Where this is the case someone can stand at a public marketplace and propagate something religious (or political) without their employer, who happens to pass by, being able to fire them for it. This benefits Christians, atheists, Muslims, as well as adherents of anthroposophy. It is the primordial cell of religious liberty.

In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the question of religious conversion is mentioned first, and therefore the question of whether an Iranian may become a Bahá'í or a Christian is an essential issue of religious liberty. Where religious conversion is not possible, there is no religious liberty.

In the General Declaration of religious liberty, it is further stated that a person may not only change their religion or worldview, but also that a person may practise their religion or worldview alone or in a community with others. Not least of all, mention is made that a person may spread a religion by means of teaching and worship services.

The belief that religious liberty would be technically possible if each person kept the religion he or she grew up with, and did not speak with

adherents of other religions, is a complete illusion. This would in effect be a prescribed form of forced religion that few would accept for themselves.

Every religious community uses conviction or some sort of pressure and coercion in order to keep its adherents. Everyone who has children knows that. Either one convinces people to remain freely with their own religion, or one exerts some sort of societal pressure to ensure that they will not want to change or cannot change. You can observe this in traditional religions as well as in highly industrialised, secular societies. An unalterable, stable and unified religious culture is only possible by coercion. If the next generation does not have the possibility to make its own decisions about what it wants to believe, that in itself is a case of a human rights violation.

## **Peaceful missionary work as an example of religious liberty**

Peaceful mission work is doubly anchored as a human right. The human right to conduct missions is derived from the right to freedom of expression. This is embedded in the 1948 United Nations' Declaration on Human Rights. Missionary activity is nothing other than freedom of expression. Just as political parties, environmental groups, and even advertisers and the media in a country publish their view of things, this applies to religions.

The Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion and Belief (Resolution 36/55 of the General Assembly of the United Nations, November 25, 1981, article 6, paragraph d) describes religious liberty as embracing the right "to write, issue and disseminate relevant publications in these areas."

The freedom of the expression of religion does not just mean that one can secretly pray in his or her own private chamber. Rather, it means the right to present one's belief to the general public and to try to attract people to it.

Whoever is against Christian missions also has to forbid all Christian worship services – and here one finds that numerous Islamic countries are, for all intents and purposes, consistent – because every worship service is, according to the Christian understanding, an invitation to receive God's grace. They would also have to deny any

Christian childrearing at home and in youth centres, something that Russian Communists understood all too well.

Granted, there have been missionary activities in the past that prepared the ground for violence and oppression. In this regard Christian and Islamic crusades and colonialism come to mind. The problem in these instances is not the public propagation of one's own views. Rather, it is the suppression of human rights. The problem is one of violence, and the term 'mission' is certainly out of place. We should also not forget that, for instance, the majority of encounters between Christianity and Islam have taken place peacefully within a missional setting, as well as one of intellectual and cultural exchange.

I would like, very briefly, to formulate the challenge facing us: The alternative is not whether all countries and religions can be convinced to abstain from trying to win people over to their religion, i.e., whether we can successfully get people to refrain from missionary activities in the sense of a-religious people - as if atheism isn't also globally spread in a missional manner. The alternative would be whether we can rally all countries and religions to allow peaceful mission work amongst one another and to refrain from all violent or societal pressure, or whether the spreading and protection of religions will occur by means of violence instead of missionary efforts.

## **Public religion as religious liberty**

At first glance, when one speaks of human rights, the topic of religious liberty appears to be a very simple issue. This is because we have the idea that religion is a private issue. This is at least true for the Western world. Religious liberty is a good thing, and every person should privately embrace his or her religion. Since most religious beliefs are practised officially in buildings of some sort, religious adherents should do what they want to in churches or mosques. As long as no crimes are committed, what they do within their own four walls is no one else's business.

That is, of course, far from reality. Religion takes place in public. People's religious beliefs influence their public behaviour, and considerable parts of the structure of our society and culture are based on religious convictions and foundations.



Among all human rights, the right to religious liberty is one of those that are the most difficult to substantiate and to cast into law and on which to reach compromise. Why? Because religion cannot be limited to a certain part of life. Rather, via the life of its adherents, religion reaches into all areas of public life, such as family and sexuality, the media, education and art, to name but a few. Even the question of what counts as religion is answered differently by each religion and culture, not to mention the areas of life for which it is responsible.

Conversion to another religion has, for example, its own dynamic in each individual country and culture around the globe. We know from history that religious conversion and worldview change do not just happen in one's living room. Rather, worldviews in people's minds end up shaping society. Whoever wants to privatise religious liberty totally has to somehow succeed in having people keep their most basic convictions completely to themselves so that they have no desire to put them into practice in public or private life. Sexual ethics, family, child rearing, attitudes toward work, toward law, and toward justice are all intertwined with basic religious and worldview ideas.

Even if globally valid principles are found, it becomes really difficult when one considers that religious liberty is connected to the entire question of the relationship between religion and the state. This question has occupied us for thousands of years. World history and church history teach us that this is one of the most complicated questions there is, in principle as well as in its concrete application. How do church and state, religion, and politics conduct themselves? If we separate the two of them too much and place them at opposite ends, religious liberty is just as much lost as if they are too closely aligned. If religion and the state are too closely associated, this results in a certain religious preference ruling the state and being used to oppress others. If religion and the state simply oppose each other, this leads to the oppression of one or all religions.

The world has proceeded on a stony path in its search for answers to these questions. For this reason, we should have the courage to promote the idea of religious liberty for all people around the world, no matter what our religious or ideological affiliation might be.

# Researching persecution and martyrdom

## Part 1. The external perspective

Christof Sauer\*

### Abstract

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

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

## 1. Perspectives, definitions and distinctions

### 1.1. Topic and perspective

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

(Marshall 2008:11)

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

(Boyd-MacMillan 2006:13-16)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **1.2. Definitions of suffering, persecution and martyrdom**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **1.3. The distinction between internal and external perspective**

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

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

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

## 2. Researching the external perspective

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

### 2.3. Social Sciences: Profiling persecution

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 2.4. Geography: Mapping persecution

Another useful approach of portraying a global picture of persecution is the expression in the form of maps. A look at various websites of Christian advocacy agencies reveals a variety of approaches.<sup>3</sup> Usually the main purpose of printed maps is to provide a visual reminder to pray for and with those suffering for their faith in Christ. The simplest approach is highlighting on a world map the countries where the worst persecution occurs. This is useful online when it is designed as an interactive interface to click on for more detailed information on a specific country (Release International 1) or when it provides this information on the map itself (Release International 2), which works best when it splits into separate maps for various regions of the world (Barnabas Fund). A next step is differentiating among the countries highlighted. One of the ways to differentiate is according to major persecuting religions, or worldviews and other reasons for persecution (Release International 3). Some also differentiate by highlighting the areas of specific campaigns, or where they are at work. Another way to differentiate is according to the degree of persecution. Voice of the Martyrs Canada only distinguishes two categories, restricted and hostile nations, while Open Doors Germany uses three shades of red according to the intensity of persecution. Unfortunately they do not mention the definitions (which do exist on their World Watch List). The International Day of Prayer (IDOP) defines four degrees of persecution<sup>4</sup>, while CSI works with a remarkable scale of 7 degrees of

<sup>3</sup> These are the websites where maps were found:

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

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

violation of religious liberties<sup>5</sup>. A further step in differentiation found on the IDOP map is the adding of keys to various countries according to the source of persecution<sup>6</sup> and the majority religion associated with it, if this is relevant. In that respect the IDOP map is most complex as it combines degree of persecution, source of persecution and majority religion. In addition it provides the best geographical differentiation. It moves beyond national entities on the map itself, by cutting through national boundaries with its different degrees of persecution. (As is done by some others, however, only for some countries). Barnabas Fund does without degrees of persecution, but provides a highly differentiated picture by adding various icons according to the ten types of persecution (as in 2.2) to each of the textual mini-country profiles on their map. Obviously such a degree of complexity can hardly be visualized on a map itself. This overview of some common practices might give an impression of the complexities in mapping persecution.

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

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

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

# Where Christians are Persecuted

## Map Key

### DEFINITION

#### Religious Liberty

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

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

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

## Key

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

### Majority Religion:

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



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

**Legend:**

- Diagonal lines: Life can be difficult for Christian minorities and harsh for converts.
- Horizontal lines: Christian minorities suffer systematic discrimination and persecution.
- Vertical lines: Persecution of Christian minorities is pervasive and severe.
- Solid grey: Historically Christian ethnic minorities at risk of genocide.

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

[www.idop.org](http://www.idop.org)  
[www.idop.in.ch](http://www.idop.in.ch)  
 World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>7</sup> [www.gmi.org](http://www.gmi.org)



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **2.7. Statistics of religion: Can martyrs be counted?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Conclusion

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

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

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# A biblical theology of persecution and discipleship: Part 1. The Pentateuch

Glenn Penner\*

## Abstract

Contrary to popular opinion, biblical teaching on religious freedom and the persecution of the righteous is not restricted to the New Testament. Significant foundational teachings are found in the Pentateuch on religious freedom, beginning with the creation of mankind in the divine image, and persecution, beginning with the Fall and the first murder, that of Abel by Cain. These foundational teachings are exemplified in the Pentateuch in the lives of its major characters including Noah, Lot, Abraham, Isaac, and Moses as they seek to live out lives of faith in the face of opposition.

**Keywords** Persecution, theology, Bible, Pentateuch, image of God, faith, human rights, Abel, Cain, Noah, Lot, Abraham, Isaac, Moses

Not surprisingly, the Pentateuch lays the foundation for a biblical theology of persecution and discipleship. Without an understanding of this foundation, our understanding of the biblical teaching on the subject will focus exclusively (or almost so) on New Testament passages – a common practice among those who teach on this subject or who work in the field of promoting religious liberty.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I recall a discussion with a well-known leader of a ministry devoted to serving the persecuted church who exclaimed, when learning of my research, “But there is no teaching on persecution in the Old Testament”!

## **The biblical basis for human rights and religious liberty**

The Christian view of human rights and religious liberty is largely based not on a set of specific biblical proof texts, but on a biblical view of mankind. The Bible uniquely describes humans as being created in the image of God (Gen 1:26,27). This has profound implications for how Christians view human rights.

### **1. God as giver and guardian of rights**

Being made in the image of God, man is by his very nature responsible to God to obey Him and to be in relationship with Him. God, in turn, chooses to act on man's behalf and to be in relationship with mankind. His character provides the foundation for laws and values that allow man, the bearer of the divine image, to have freedom without chaos.

Such freedom is not found simply by obeying divine commands.<sup>2</sup> The place to begin is not with the assertion that "this is what the Bible says and therefore we must obey." We must, of course, be careful to take seriously God's revelation in the Scriptures. But God's revelation is first and foremost a revelation of Himself. The basis of all biblical commands is the character of God, whose character we are to reflect as image-bearers. God expects us to act toward others as He acts toward us.

Even a cursory examination of the scriptural record reveals a God who is particularly concerned with the minimal civil rights of people belonging to vulnerable groups. The Mosaic Law, for example, surpassed other contemporary civil codes in its affirmation of fair and equitable treatment of all citizens regardless of their social status. The right to life and to be unharmed, is intrinsic to each human life, since we are created in a body of flesh and blood. Protection from being denied the necessities of life, theft of personal property, physical abuse, abortion, and being taken hostage all find biblical support as requirements of God's justice for those created in His image.

A Christian view of human rights, therefore, locates these rights within a framework where God is both the giver of responsibility and the guardian of rights. Humans have rights because God cares for

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<sup>2</sup> This concept is in contrast to Islam and its imposition of Sharia law.

them, protects them, and demands justice for them. In that sense, He gives us rights and guards them.

## 2. The right to be respected

As a bearer of the image of God, though marred by sin, individuals are worthy of respect and possessors of dignity. To disrespect the image bearer is to disrespect the one whose image is being represented (Jas 3:9). This is foundational to a biblical worldview and a Christian view of human rights. In looking for the basis for the rights of humans we should not, as Paul Marshall notes, look for a self-contained, inherent dignity or for the presence of a supposed defining human characteristic such as will, reason, or conscience. Instead we should look first to our status as God's creatures.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast neither Islam nor communism acknowledges that man is created in the image of God.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, they do not have a basis for determining why human beings have rights to freedom of belief and have therefore been consistently unable or unwilling to protect these rights. Freedoms, under such systems, become those rights that are given to individuals or groups rather than rights that are acknowledged as being intrinsic to humanity. Rights, in the Christian perspective, are not given by any human institution but are acknowledged and upheld as being granted by God.

## 3. The right to be wrong

In Exodus 22:21, we find the Lord commanding Israel not to oppress the foreigner. It is significant that this admonition immediately follows the Lord's instructions to execute those who worship other gods. At first glance, this may appear contradictory. What is apparent, however, is that while the Israelites were not to worship foreign deities, they were not to oppress the foreigner himself. This implies permission for

<sup>3</sup> Paul Marshall, "Dooyeweerd's Empirical Theory of Rights." *The Legacy of Herman Dooyeweerd*. ed. C. T. McIntire. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985:119–142.

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, communism, being atheistic in orientation, actually denies it. Regarding Islam's teaching, see Christine Schirrmacher, *The Islamic View of the Major Christian Teachings*. Hamburg: RVB, 2001:27,28; Bruce A. McDowell and Anees Zaka, *Muslims and Christians at the Table*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1999:125,126; Don Richardson, *Secrets of the Koran*. Ventura: Regal, 2003:141–143. In Surah 4:28, man is described as being created "weak."

the foreigner to continue his religious practice in Israel. Only when the foreigner's religious practice involved such heinous customs as child sacrifice was this religious liberty to be restricted (Lev 20:2). God's people were to keep themselves separate from false religious systems of their day, yet without violating the rights of those whom they knew to be wrong.<sup>5</sup>

As Marshall points out, Israel was never instructed to conduct a crusade or holy war against foreign nations beyond their borders. Later commands to root out idolatry were directed against the practices of Israel itself. Other nations were free to order their religious life, even though their beliefs and practices were specifically and categorically branded as false.<sup>6</sup> Still we must remember that Israel was expected to be a blessing for all nations and a testimony to the truth of God.

Exemplified by the Creator's willingness to allow false religious beliefs to continue unpunished for the present, Christians uphold the right for the individual or group to be wrong. Therein lies the difference between evangelism and proselytism.<sup>7</sup> Religious coercion is a violation of an individual's God-given right to choose one's own belief system. Even if a religious practice is deemed incorrect, morally repugnant, and inconsistent with the general and special revelation of God, so long as it does not violate the rights of others, it should be not interfered with.

This does not negate the importance of apologetics and evangelism. As God's image bearers, we are His messengers, seeking to restore individuals to a right relationship with their Creator. Yet, reflecting God's image, we do so through persuasion, not compulsion. Being created in the image of God calls us to use methods that respect the rights of others to be wrong, if they persist in upholding their beliefs.

Countries that have historically been influenced by a strong Christian worldview (and Protestantism in particular) have been demonstrated to maintain the highest levels of religious liberty for

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Marshall, *A Christian Defense of Religious Liberty*. A position paper for Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, 1996:1,2. - <http://tinyurl.com/634wqn>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.: 2.

<sup>7</sup> See Penner 2004:102-104 for further discussion of the difference between evangelism and proselytism in the light of the doctrine of the Trinity.

their citizens. Of course, such freedoms have not always been consistently upheld. The brutal persecution of Anabaptists during the Reformation is only one tragic example of how Christians have failed to consistently practice a biblical view of religious liberty. Evangelicals continue to be persecuted in parts of Latin America in the name of Roman Catholicism, just as they do in Ethiopia in the name of Ethiopian Orthodoxy. Recent developments in western Europe should cause Christians great concern, as countries such as Belgium, Austria, Germany, and France have passed legislation restricting the activities and existence of new, non-orthodox religions or “sects.” In their antipathy to and ignorance of these new faiths, many in these societies tend to pigeonhole evangelical minorities together with groups that are genuinely dangerous. In eastern Europe, governments are increasingly restricting the activities and existence of religious groups that may potentially challenge the hegemony of the historically dominant one. It must be asserted, however, that such actions are not the fruit of a truly biblical view of human rights but violations of it. Christianity must not be judged by the actions of its inconsistent followers but by the actions, teachings, and revealed character of its Founder.

#### **4. The lack of individual autonomy**

The individual, being created in the image of God, is not autonomous, because God in Scripture is revealed as being triune: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The implication for individuals made in the image of God is that complementary relationships are intrinsic to what it means to be human, just as God’s revealed reality (His “ontology”) is constituted by complementary relationships between the members of the Trinity. In the same way, man cannot be an autonomous individual. To be created in the image of God means that to exist is to be relational. Therefore any concept of human rights must be seen in the context of man as a relational being. We cannot act any way that we like without regard for others. Rights are not simply individualistic but pertain to the individual within relationships.

#### **5. The right to communal relationships**

In the same way, human beings, created in the image of a triune God, cannot be rightfully deprived of communal relationships with others. Religion, in particular, is intrinsically communal, for it is God’s ideal

that persons live in communion with each other, the world, and their God.<sup>8</sup> It is not good for people to be alone (Gen 2:18). When religion is forcibly privatized, it has ceased to be recognized as a right and religious liberty has historically been considered the first right from which all others stem.

## 6. The basis for equality

Being created in the image of God also gives real insights into the true nature of equality. The equality of women with men is built into the imago dei assertion, for example. All humans are equally reflections of God, regardless of whether they worship Him or not. Our very nature contradicts any Orwellian concept that “all are equal but some are more equal than others.”

## 7. The basis for difference

This equality, however, is to be understood in the context of the image of the Trinity. As the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have equality, they also have complementary roles and interpersonal relationships among the Trinity. This intercommunication among the three does not mean that they are not distinguishable from each other. Equality does not equal sameness. Being created in the image of the triune God makes each person unique.<sup>9</sup> While all humans are equal, they do not have to be the same.

## 8. The basis for freedom

The nature of the Trinity also reflects freedom. The members of the Trinity freely love each other. In the Gospel accounts of the events that transpired in the Garden of Gethsemane, we see the Son having to choose whether He will obey the Father. He struggles. It is not His desire to die, but He freely chooses to do that which He knows is right.

While freedom of choice was part of our original, created state, as fallen human beings we can no longer truly claim to have a truly “free will.” Paul tells us in Romans 1 that we consistently choose the wrong, and even the right we do choose is often tarnished with ulterior motives. While some would argue that this must require an irresistible

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<sup>8</sup> Roderick T. Leupp, *Knowing the Name of God*. Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 1996:95.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

act on God's part, it seems to me that a better explanation is found in what may be described in Wesleyan circles as "prevenient grace," whereby God frees our will to obey Him and to choose to follow Him. Hence, I believe that it is far more accurate to refer to the "freed will," rather than to "free will." The former still gives the full glory to God; the latter does not take sin seriously enough and makes it sound like the mind was unaffected by the Fall and sin.<sup>10</sup>

Still, even in our fallen state we yearn for freedom that can and should provide the environment for unrestricted practice of worship and propagation of the faith. The free expression of one's beliefs is to be upheld and promoted as God's intended plan for His image bearers. The Edenic ideal should not be discarded. As we have noted, in societies where biblical Christianity has had a greater influence on societal norms and values, we catch a glimpse of the Edenic ideal. Even there, however, as in the rest of the fallen world, this freedom is constantly threatened and never experienced consistently. As we shall see in our discussion of Genesis 3, the process of restoring God's creation to its intended state will be one of conflict. Ideally, religious freedom is a good thing. In this fallen world, however, the absence of religious persecution can also be a sign that the process of restoration has slowed or stalled as God's messengers stop being His agents of reconciliation in a hostile world. Hence, Christians should work to establish and maintain religious liberty. This is God's ideal, but not for our own comfort and not at the expense of our evangelistic zeal.

Having established the foundation for human rights and religious liberty in Genesis 1 and 2, we must, of necessity, continue reading through Genesis 3, which explains why things are not as they ought to be.

## The biblical basis for persecution

It is noteworthy that at the end of Genesis 1 and 2, we find God announcing that creation is "good." Yet, in the very first verse of chapter 3, we find something that apparently is not good:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"

Two initial observations are noteworthy:

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<sup>10</sup> Space prevents further discussion on this important subject.

- From the nature of the question it is obvious that the serpent (Satan) is already in rebellion against God.
- The fact that Satan can be in rebellion, and creation is still considered “good” by God tells us that Satan is not responsible for our world being what it is today. Satan is not the one to blame for the world being “not good.” These observations become clear in 3:2-13.

In verses 2-7 we witness how the relationship between God and His image bearers has been broken, as the reflection seeks to supplant the Reality. Rather than enjoying the unique relationship with their Creator and the unrestricted access to God that they had known and been privileged to, they now hide (verse 8). Religious freedom in the Edenic experience is no longer truly possible. Yet, God still seeks out those whom He created to have fellowship with Him (verses 9-11).

Exposed and challenged with the reality of their disobedience, both Adam and Eve look for someone to blame (verses 12,13). The man blames the woman and, indirectly, God (*the woman whom you gave to be with me*). The woman blames the snake. And, as one of my seminary professors liked to say whenever he referred to this passage, the snake didn't have a leg to stand on. In reality, Satan had beguiled the woman, the woman had listened to the serpent, and the man had listened to the woman - but no one had listened to God.<sup>11</sup> As a result, God issues a prophetic word of judgment and deliverance to the serpent (verses 14,15), the woman (verse 16), and the man (verses 17-19).<sup>12</sup>

Notice in verses 14, 15 that God does not say that nature is cursed because of the serpent, but that he will be more cursed than the rest of nature. He is condemned to humiliation and ultimate defeat under the victorious offspring of the woman. Satan's judgment, accomplished through human instrumentality, will bring deliverance to the offspring of the woman, but in a process of bruising and pain. The deliverance will come through the crushing of the serpent's head, but in the process the heel that crushes him will be bruised. This motif of deliverance in the process of pain is repeated in the words that follow to the woman and her husband.

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<sup>11</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978:78.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.



The nature of the woman's curse in verse 16 is rooted in the nature of her sin. As Raymond Ortlund notes, the woman's curse is twofold. First, as a mother, she will suffer in relation to her children.

She will still be able to bear children. This is God's mercy providing the means by which He will carry out His death sentence on the serpent. But now the woman will suffer in childbirth. This is God's severity for her sin. The new element in her experience, then, is not childbirth but the pain of childbirth.<sup>13</sup>

Second, as a wife, she will suffer in relation to her husband. Ortlund comments, "The exact content of her marital suffering could be defined in either of two ways. Either she will suffer conflict with her husband, or she will suffer domination by him." There are two factors that lead me to conclude that the former interpretation is to be preferred. First, in the following chapter, there is a passage (4:7) that is virtually identical to that in 3:16. In 4:7, Cain is told that sin has a desire for him, but he must master it. Sin's desire was to control Cain and have its way with him. Virtually identical phraseology is found in 3:16 and helps to explain the woman's "desire" for her husband. God tells the woman that the relationship between her and her husband will be one of conflict and control. God gives her up to a desire to control him, to have her way with him, to exercise spiritual leadership (just as she had done during the serpent's temptation), but her husband must not allow this to happen. He must assume his role as the head. This interpretation most closely follows the reasoning in 4:7. The second reason I favour this interpretation is that it mirrors the curse of the serpent in that it first defines the curse, and then is followed by a statement of hope. The hope of the strained relationship between the woman and her husband is not in the competition that is a result of the Fall but in the restoration of the relationship that they had prior to it. This was a relationship where the man was the spiritual head and the wife functioned as helpmate and partner.

It is in verses 17-19 that we finally understand why creation is no longer "good." Having been given stewardship over the world, Adam will now find his work painful. Just as childbirth was not the woman's curse, neither is work to be seen as man's curse. Work is part of what it means to be created in the image of God. But now, because of the

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<sup>13</sup> Raymond C. Ortlund, "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship" in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. ed. by John Piper and Wayne A. Grudem. Wheaton: Crossway, 1991:97.

Fall, man's work will be painful and temporal. He will spend his entire life working the soil, only to return to it at the end.

This is not the way he was created to function. Failure and pain are not due to one being "human" but because one is "fallen." The fault is not with creation, God, or even with Satan. The culprit responsible for this world's condition is man, created in the image of God, who decided that being an image bearer was insufficient. The image of God sought equality with God.

But man is not without hope. In verse 22, God casts him out of the garden as an act of grace "lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever." Because of the Fall, immortality would be unbearable as sin would multiply out of control in the life of the individual and throughout society. Death is, hence, an act of grace, controlling the depth and scope of depravity.

But man's "deadness" is not merely physical. He is dead spiritually and this requires God's intervention – the crushing of the serpent's head, whereby restoration to fellowship with God and spiritual "aliveness" is enabled. This is what was promised to the woman.

And Adam remembers this promise contained in God's words concerning the offspring of the woman who would bruise the serpent's head. So we read Adam, in his role as spiritual head, giving the woman the name "Eve" (hawwah) from which "life" (hay) will come. The play on words is significant and deliberate. There is hope in the offspring of the woman. Just as Adam came from "adamah" (Hebrew for "earth"), so life (hay) will come from Eve (hawwah). Ortlund notes:

By these dreadful, and yet hopeful, oracles of destiny (3:14–19), God shapes for us the existence we all share today. Under these conditions, our pain alerts us to a great truth: This life is not our fulfillment. This life is not meant to be a final experience. Our pain and limitations point us to God, to the eternal, to the transcendent, where our true fulfillment lies.

Adam understood this truth, I think. Instead of turning away from the bar of God's justice in bitterness and despair, Adam turns to his wife and says, "I believe God's promise. He has not cast us adrift completely. He will give us the final victory over our enemy and we will again enjoy the richness and fullness of life in God. And because

you are the mother of all those who will truly live, I give you a new name – Eve, Living One. I believe God, and I honor you.” In contrast to the cruel, cutting words of verse 12, Adam reaches out in love to Eve and they are reunited in faith and hope.<sup>14</sup>

Note, however, that the solution to man’s suffering because of sin will come *through* suffering. The heel will be struck. In the process of crushing the serpent, the heel of the woman’s offspring will be bruised. The setting is that of conflict between the serpent and the woman, which is echoed in Revelation 12. It is in Genesis 3 that we see the basis for the coming persecution of God’s people. The reconciling of creation to its Creator will take place in a context of suffering and conflict.

Following the creation of man and the giving of man’s divine mandate to be fruitful and multiply, to subdue the earth and exercise dominion as His image bearer (1:22,26,28), God declares that His work of creation is finished (*šābat*) (2:3). In His work of restoring creation to this condition of perfection, God will make two other proclamations of His work being “finished.”<sup>15</sup> The second time is on the cross when redemption promised becomes redemption accomplished (John 19:30). The third is in Revelation 21:6 when God’s work is once and for all finished. Not only will the punishment and penalty of sin be accomplished but also the very presence of sin will be removed and full restoration will be achieved. But God’s plan of restoration did not begin at the Fall, as though it were unexpected. From the very beginning, God designed a plan to restore His creation to the place where it can again be declared “good.”

It is obvious from the biblical record that God created man knowing he would rebel and that He had drawn up careful plans to deal with the consequences. This foreknowledge does not make God responsible for the Fall, in as much as He gave man genuine freedom from creation to freely choose or to freely reject His love. Being created in the image of God, man was capable of genuine independent choice and, like God, capable of real love.<sup>16</sup> Absolute free will is a prerequisite of true love. Forced or predetermined love is no love at all. In His creation of man, God had to allow for the possibility (indeed, the inevitability) that His love would be rejected in order that

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<sup>14</sup> Ortlund: 99.

<sup>15</sup> Kaiser: 76.

<sup>16</sup> A. E. Wilder-Smith, *Why Does God Allow It?* San Diego: Master, 1980:51.

those who would respond to His grace would do so genuinely. As the early church fathers understood, force is no attribute of God.<sup>17</sup> To create mankind in His image but deny them the freedom not to love and trust Him would have been a violation of His own character. God created a world knowing that His representatives would reject Him, subjecting His creation to ruin. Yet, He chose to do so to the end that His glory and character might be perfectly seen in the restoration and enjoyed by those who submitted to His grace in their lives. Knowing this, He set His plan in motion, as the Scriptures say, from the foundation of the world, doing everything possible to bring restoration and completeness back to His creation.

But the path to this full restoration will be of conflict, pain, and bruising, as foretold in Genesis 3:15. It does not take long for this conflict to be manifested.

## Cain and Abel

It is interesting to note that the first case of persecution in the Bible begins in a place of worship. In the first recorded time of formal worship before the Lord, we find the sons of Adam and Eve bringing offerings to the Lord in Genesis 4:2-5.

We are not told exactly why Cain's offering was unacceptable to God, while Abel's pleased him. It is likely that Cain brought simply some samples of his harvest, whereas Abel made certain that what he brought was only the best. Thus Abel gave out of faith and thankfulness, whereas Cain gave only out of duty.

Likewise, we are not told how God expressed His displeasure with Cain's offering, but it was obviously done in such a manner that Cain understood and was angry that God should respond that way to his sacrifice. The Lord refused to ignore Cain's response and, in grace, calls him to repentance in verses 6-7.

That Cain did not heed God's call to rule over his anger and instead allowed it to master him is evident. Cain refused to bow the knee before God and he decided to rid himself of his religious opponent, even if it is his own brother. At this point we witness the first incident of religious persecution as Cain rose up and killed Abel (verse 8).

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<sup>17</sup> cf. Penner: 101-104.

It is obvious that the New Testament views Abel's death as much more than the result of sibling rivalry or a family squabble that got out of control. Jesus clearly saw Abel's death as an act of martyrdom (Matt 23:35), as does the apostle John (1 Jn 3:12). John explains that Abel's death was because Cain's acts were evil and Abel's were righteous. Abel's death is clearly set in a context of martyrdom, a result of the conflict between the world and those who belong to God (1 Jn 3:13).

Not only did persecution begin because of religious intolerance, but it also took place in the home. Just as it divided the first family, loyalty to God continues to cut families asunder, providing stark demonstrations of the cruel reality of the conflict between the seed of the woman and the serpent. Families, as important as they are for our nurture and security, can also be places of terrible violence.

The Lord's response to Abel's murder is instructive to us. He says that the voice of Abel's blood "is crying to me from the ground" (4:10). The word used here for "crying" (sa'aq) is frequently used in the Old Testament to describe the outcry of the individual or group who are suffering injustice and require intervention on their behalf.<sup>18</sup> It often refers to God hearing the outcries of the oppressed because they have been denied justice and are unable to defend themselves from unlawful oppression and exploitation.<sup>19</sup> On the use of the word in Genesis 18:20, Gerhard von Rad comments that the word is a technical legal term and designates the cry for help which one who suffers a great injustice screams.<sup>20</sup>

We even know what the cry was, namely, "Foul play!" (*hāmās*, Jer. 20.8; Hab. 1.2; Job 19.7). With this cry for help (which corresponds to the old German *Zeterruf*), he appeals for the protection of the legal community. What it does not hear or grant, however, comes directly before Yahweh as the guardian of all right (cf. ch. 4.10). Yahweh, therefore, is not concerned with punishing Sodom but rather with an

<sup>18</sup> John E. Hartley, (sā'aq) in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2. ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke. Chicago: Moody, 1980:772.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Marshall, "Human Rights" in *Toward an Evangelical Public Policy*. ed. Ronald J. Sider and Diane Knippers. Grand Rapids: Baker: 2004:313.

<sup>20</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis, A Commentary. Revised edition*. Norwich: SCM, 1961:211.

investigation of the case, which is serious, to be sure. The proceeding is hereby opened.<sup>21</sup>

Novak observes that it is here that we read of the very first appeal made to God to enforce a human right, in this case the human right to have one's murder avenged.<sup>22</sup>

Thus God says to Cain immediately after he has murdered his brother Abel, "What you have done! Your brother's blood is crying [tso.aqim] to Me from the ground" (Gen. 4:10).

In the Cain and Abel story, Abel has a claim upon Cain: Do not kill me! Why? Because God takes personal interest in every human person who has been created in the divine image. In fact, that is very likely what it means to say that all humankind is made to "resemble God" (Gen. 5:1), namely, God and humans are interested in each other insofar as they share some commonality, a commonality not found in God's relations with the rest of creation.<sup>23</sup>

God's justice requires that He punish Cain for the murder of his brother, for such an assault on any other human being is taken to be an assault on God himself. In sentencing him, however, God does not condemn Cain to being a disdained outcast, liable to vigilante justice.<sup>24</sup> This is what Cain fears (4:14). God, in His mercy, places a mark on Cain to protect him too from being wrongfully killed (Gen 4:8–17).

Cain had complained that he would be hidden from God's presence or face and terrified that he would be denied God's judicial protection. The imagery of God hiding His presence or face is a common one in Scripture, meaning to refuse to notice something and thus avoid responding to it.<sup>25</sup> The Lord's response is evidence that, even as a murderer, Cain is not beyond God's mercy and protection.<sup>26</sup> Cain's life, like Abel's and all humans', belongs to God and He will not abandon it. The right to life is protected by God, even for those who do not deserve it.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> David Novak, "God and Human Rights in a Secular Society: in *Does Human Rights Need God?* ed. Elizabeth M. Bucar and Barbra Barnett. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005:51.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> LeLand Ryken, James C. Wilmot, Tremper Longman III, "Hide, Hiding" in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Downers Grove: IVP, 1998:383.

<sup>26</sup> Eugene F. Roop, *Genesis*. Believers Church Bible Commentary. Scottdale, Pa.: Herald, 1987:53.

## Noah

Following the story of Cain, Noah becomes the next major character in the Old Testament narrative to whom considerable attention is drawn. The focus of our discussion, however, is not on Noah as the instrument of God's preservation of His creation, but on the instructions that God gives him regarding the preservation of human life in Genesis 9:5,6. From each man, God says, He will "require a reckoning for the life of man" (9:5b). However, unlike the situation with Cain and Abel when God appeared directly as a judge, this accounting was no longer solely God's exclusive responsibility. It is now shared with human beings.<sup>27</sup> This is reiterated in verse 6: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, *by man* shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image" (emphasis added).

In this passage, God announces that mankind has been delegated the responsibility of being God's instruments of justice and upholders of basic human rights such as the right to life. They are not called upon to wait for divine retribution or intervention. This does not justify the use of vigilante justice, as the rest of Scripture makes clear. The responsibility for exercising this God-given instrumentality is placed in the hands of civil authorities who are given rights that individuals do not possess. But the responsibility to uphold and support the rights of one's fellow image bearers is a divine mandate. Those who cry out for justice should not be met with a wall of indifferent silence from those who claim to be fellow image bearers and especially not from those who are being renewed into the full image of God through the work of Jesus Christ.

## Lot

Surprisingly, given the generally negative reputation he has been given, we read in 2 Peter 2:7 that Lot is described as a "righteous man who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men."

While by no means the best example of righteousness, Peter sees Lot's deliverance from Sodom as deliverance from persecution in 2 Peter 2:7-9.

From Lot's example we can see that persecution is not restricted to only mature believers or spiritual giants. All who claim to follow

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<sup>27</sup> von Rad: 133.

God will undoubtedly be, at some point, called upon to take a stand. In Lot's case, while much of his life was characterized by compromise, to his credit he did rise to the challenge when called upon.

## **Abraham**

When the biblical record seeks an example of faith, it inevitably points to Abraham. Called out of a pagan background, he was told to pack up, leave his home, and go to a land that God would show him. He is promised that God would make him into a great nation and a source of blessing for the entire world.

As God unfolded His plan for restoring the world to its original created state, Abraham plays a pivotal role (Gen 12:1–4; 15:5,6).

But the path of faith to which he has been called is not an easy one. For his entire life, he lived in a tent as a nomad. Hebrews 11, when referring to Abraham, puts it in this perspective: “By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb 11:9,10).

God promised him a son and then waited nearly Abraham's whole life before fulfilling it. Indeed, God waited until it is seemingly too late, and Abraham despairs. Then, after God fulfilled His promise, He made the shocking declaration that Abraham was to take his son up to a mountain and kill him. Can you imagine the anguish that Abraham must have felt? The confusion? Yes, even the doubts?

But Abraham obeyed. And at the very last moment, God intervened and provided a substitute in the form of a ram. Then, once again, He restated His original promise that Abraham would be the source of blessings for all nations because of his obedience (Gen 22:15–18).

Abraham's faithful obedience was not a painless one. It was a path marked with disappointments, pain, and tears. It was a path that did not see the complete fulfillment of God's promises in his lifetime. Instead, as Hebrews 11:16 says, “They were longing for a better country - a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”



God's plan to reconcile the world to Himself involved calling a man away from home, familiarity, and comfort, taking him into exile into the wilderness to a strange land and into suffering and promise. From Abraham's life we glean the valuable lesson that true faith inevitably suffers, sacrifices, and hopes.

## Isaac

Isaac continues Abraham's legacy. As he tries to make a home in the land that God has promised him, he suffers from the envy of the Philistines and others because of the evident blessing of God on his life. They fill or confiscate his wells, causing him to move on to other areas to water his herds. Finally, as his enemies witness God's continued blessing on his life and his refusal to retaliate, they make peace with him, leading to the end of persecution (Gen 26:12–33). But Isaac demonstrates that experiencing God's blessing may result in significant opposition and hardship. The call is to respond graciously, voluntarily depriving oneself in order to maintain one's integrity and witness before others.

## Egypt's oppression of Israel

Israel is described in Scripture as being "oppressed" by Pharaoh and the Egyptians (Exod 1:11,12). They suffer not because of individual or corporate sin, but simply because of who they are as a people. The Lord declares that He is concerned about their suffering and desires to free them from the oppression of the Egyptians (Exodus 3:7–10). His desire and concern are concretely expressed in firstly coming down (3:8). Fretheim observes that God's "coming down" suggests that God sees suffering from the inside; He does not look at it from the outside as an observer. He enters fully into the hurtful situation and makes it his own.<sup>28</sup> Further, He raises up a deliverer in the very household of their oppressors.

In Exodus 2:15, Moses kills a guard who had been beating a fellow Israelite and consequently is forced to flee into exile when Pharaoh seeks his life in return. The author of Hebrews provides a commentary on what had led up to this action. Moses, he writes, was faced with a difficult choice. He could remain in the palace and enjoy

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<sup>28</sup> Terence E. Fretheim. *The Suffering of God*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984:128.

the “passing pleasures of sin,” or he could relinquish the palace and choose to be “mistreated along with the people of God” (11:24–26).

We know from the story recorded in Exodus that he chose the latter and dedicated his life to the liberation of his people from slavery and to the establishment of a people who would serve God. This choice involved Moses in a lifetime of hardship, toil, tears, and threats.<sup>29</sup> He faced opposition from both within the household of faith and from without - from Egyptian oppressors and from those he was sent to deliver. The author of Hebrews refers to Moses’ actions as reproach “for the sake of Christ” as he looked ahead to a greater reward than that which he could have enjoyed as Egyptian royalty (11:26). Sacrificing for the purposes of God is a Christlike kind of reproach.

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<sup>29</sup> E.g. Exod 17:4 where Moses is threatened with stoning by the people.

# Towards redefining persecution

Charles L Tieszen\*

## Abstract

This study is a reevaluation of the ways in which religious persecution is presently understood. After briefly demonstrating various shortcomings apparent in many considerations of the event, the author will set out a comprehensive definition of the religious persecution of Christians in an effort to overcome the misunderstandings that hamper theological reflection.

**Keywords** Persecution, theology of persecution, martyrdom.

## Introduction

Since the Church's founding, nearly 70 million Christians have been killed for their faith (Barrett and Johnson 2001:227). Even more remarkable than this statistic is that the great majority of these – nearly sixty-five percent – were martyred in the twentieth century alone (229). While the historical forces behind these deaths change, the trend unfortunately has not, for at the mid-point of the present year, Christian martyrs were already estimated to have reached well over 150,000 (Barrett, Johnson and Crossing 2008:30).

These numbers are startling, yet how does one assess forms of persecution that may not be so violent or easily observable? How does one enumerate, for instance, ridicule, ostracism, or harassment? Consideration of acts such as these would surely exacerbate the numbers given above. It is perhaps as a result of persecution's elusive nature that the event lacks the reflection it so direly needs. While we do not lack for personal accounts of persecution experiences, and while these stories are helpful for those who must endure them, and

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helpful for those whose support might be rallied by reading them, this neglect is most apparent when it comes to the way the term is understood, and the attention it receives in *theological* reflection.

Regrettably, much of the theological reflection on persecution that is available to Christians today simply falls short of a thorough understanding of the event. This is evident in studies that limit religious persecution to the experience of the Early Church, and assert that it simply no longer occurs. Likewise, various studies limit the experience of persecution to only eschatological events, thinking that troubling times will only occur in the future as signposts for Christ's immanent return. Other studies reflect a misunderstanding of persecution insofar as they consider it to be a strictly violent act that may end in martyrdom. Thus, such experiences are mistakenly thought to be found only in the Majority World, not in the West, where freedom of religion is thought to be a widely accepted value. Still others extend the experience of persecution to all forms of suffering. Any unfortunate occurrence a Christian might endure, therefore, is thought to be persecution (Tieszen 2008:17–35).

Clearly, these reflections are simply not satisfactory, and contribute to our inability to adequately respond to and reflect upon genuine experiences of religious persecution. Moreover, it is these shortcomings that form the underpinnings of a tendency to rely on insufficient definitions of the term. To that end, the remainder of this study will strive to contribute towards a more complete definition of persecution.

## **Defining the religious persecution of Christians**

Croatian theologian Peter Kuzmič laments, “Contemporary reference works on religion move remarkably easily from ‘Perfectionism’ to ‘Perseverance’” (Kuzmič 2004–2005:35). Glenn Penner observes this absence of a definition as well, and remarks, “There is, unfortunately, no universally accepted legal or theological definition of [persecution]” (Penner 2004:163). Indeed, even where attempts are made, current definitions all too commonly reflect some of the misgivings noted above, choosing to define the event based on a period in which it may occur (applying it to the Early Church or as an end-times event), or to a manner in which it may manifest itself (violent acts).

Understanding persecution correctly cannot occur when definitions of the term are restricted or completely absent. In our study, a thorough definition is offered instead on three levels. On the first level, we begin by defining the term persecution in its most basic form, without reference to religion or to Christians, for confusion lies primarily at this level. On the second level, the importance of religion as a factor in determining the type of persecution involved in a given situation will be considered. It is here that we are also able to establish a socio-political definition of religious persecution. On the third level, we must combine the elements of persecution and religion with a definition of “Christian” in order to most accurately define the type of persecution we are reflecting on presently. Finally, we must understand this definition theologically in order to distinguish it from other socio-political definitions. These pieces, taken together, might possibly represent a more robust theological definition and understanding of the religious persecution of Christians.

### **Level one: Persecution**

On this first level, persecution must be understood as an action. Consequently, one cannot merely have, for example, discriminatory attitudes and be a persecutor. Rather, persecutors act on these attitudes. When they do, persecution occurs. Further, this action should be viewed as unjust.

With this in mind, persecution occurs within a broad spectrum ranging from unjust actions that are intensely hostile, to those that are mildly hostile. Intensely hostile actions, lying at one end of the spectrum, can be carried out physically, psychologically (mentally or emotionally), or socially. These could encompass such actions as beating, torture, isolation, or imprisonment.

Mildly hostile actions lie at the opposite end of this spectrum. These actions are less intense, not violent, and can also be carried out psychologically or socially. These would include ridicule, restriction, certain kinds of harassment, or discrimination. Unjust actions that are mildly hostile are no less significant, and should still be considered as persecution. As a result, we cannot define persecution based on the level of pain it might cause, or the level of intensity in which it occurs. Instead, it must be understood to encompass actions spanning the full range of hostility, be they physical, psychological, or social. In this

light, a thorough definition of persecution will place an emphasis on unjust action manifesting itself within a spectrum of hostility.

Beyond this spectrum, we must remember that persecution may be carried out with a number of different motivations. Furthermore, these motivations often overlap, since persecution rarely has a single impetus (Marshall 1998:2; Marshall 2004–2005:27). Consider the example of a Hindu who marries outside of his or her caste. Doing so may require the parents to ostracize the couple from their entire community. This however, may not just be an issue of religion, but an issue of ethnicity as well, in that one's caste may be tied to one's particular indigenous group. Other situations could also represent a mix of "... political, territorial, and economic concerns" (Marshall 1998:2).

Finally, it is important, on this first level, to understand that the results of persecution are negative and persecutory when viewed from the victim's perspective. In this, negative results are harmful as long as we recognize that harm encompasses the same span of intensity as our understanding of hostility does. Harm, then, can be physical, psychological, or social, and occurs within a spectrum ranging from mildly to intensely hostile. Most important, however, is the recognition that such a definition is produced from the perspective of the victim, not that of the perpetrator.

Cases of nationalism may be helpful illustrations of this vital point. For nineteenth and early-twentieth century Turks, for example, their nationalistic "Turkey for the Turks" provided a basis for the expulsion of Armenians. While the situation was complex, and national security may originally have been a genuine concern, the deportation, genocide, and other horrific events that eventually followed were justified for many Turks in terms of nationalism. They were protecting or ridding their country of what to them were foreign and evil influences. For many Turks, their actions were just, and their results were positive. For Armenians, however, this was a clear case of persecution. It was an unjust action perpetrated on the basis of, in this case, ethnicity, politics, and religion. The results were in fact negative and persecutory. Other examples could include instances in which there was no intention of persecuting, yet persecution occurred nevertheless. As Paul Marshall makes clear: "The motive is not, per se, the issue; the key question is, what is the result?" (Marshall 2000b:17; Marshall 1998:7; Schirrmacher 2001:97-99).

On this first level, then, a definition of persecution must consider the elements of unjust action, a spectrum of hostility ranging from mild to intense, the motivations behind persecution, and the resulting effect of harm, all of which are considered from the victim's perspective. In its most basic form, we might define persecution as:

An unjust action of varying levels of hostility with one or more motivations, directed at a specific individual or a specific group of individuals, resulting in varying levels of harm as it is considered from the victim's perspective.

### **Level two: Religious persecution**

Keeping this basic definition in mind, we cannot assume that all persecution is always religious persecution. More specifically, religious people who are persecuted are not necessarily the victims of religious persecution. As Marshall observes, the conflicts occurring in Rwanda in the mid-1990's are illustrative of this important distinction (Marshall 2000b:9). In this case, Tutsis experienced much persecution, and even death, at the hands of Hutus, but even so, this was primarily an ethnic conflict. Religious people of various convictions made up parts of both sides, and so the nature and motivation of this persecution situation cannot be understood in religious terms. In short, Tutsis were persecuted regardless of their religion. With such examples in mind, we note that a victim's religious identity cannot be the sole factor that determines the type of persecution. Marshall helps us here once again:

A possible demarcation point of religious persecution is to ask whether, if the persons had other religious beliefs, they [sic] would they still be treated in the same way. If the answer is yes, we probably should not call it specifically religious persecution, though not for a second should we forget that it is real persecution and that it is real people who suffer it (Marshall 1998:5).

The clarification we note on the first level applies here as well – rarely is religion, or any other single motivation, the only one involved. Other factors often overlap. What distinguishes certain cases as religious persecution is the primacy of religion as the leading factor. In our example from Rwanda, although religious people were certainly involved, religion itself was far from being a primary motivation of extremist Hutus. If we remove religious factors, Tutsis would still have been subjected to persecution, and so their experience cannot be

seen as religious persecution. Conversely, the experience of Christians in early-twentieth century communist Russia, while also involving political issues, centred on the religion of its victims. If we ask Marshall's question, we might conclude that these individuals could certainly have been spared if it had not been for their identity as Christians. Thus we can conclude that this is an example of religious persecution.

We must do more on this second level, however, than establish religion's role in persecution. With this in mind, most definitions of religious persecution operate on socio-political standards. Accordingly, religious persecution is "... in general, the denial of any of the rights of religious freedom" (Marshall 2000a:21). More specifically, religious freedom can be considered under the United Nations' "Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, 1981." Therein, individuals must be free not only to worship in accordance with the fundamentals of their religion, but they must also be free to change their religion, and to appropriately propagate their faith (20–21; Stott 1975:50). Socio-political definitions of religious persecution like these include, at the very least, genocide, but also focus on the *systematic* violation of religious freedoms. So, to supplement this understanding, Marshall includes the terms "harassment" and "discrimination" (Marshall 1998:5). In reference to religion and faith, then, harassment indicates "... a situation where people, although perhaps not systematically imprisoned or denied the basic possibility of following their faith, nevertheless suffer from legal impediments and are interfered with by the authorities or others and face arbitrary arrest and possible physical assault" (5). In the same way, discrimination refers to "... a situation where people, although perhaps being guaranteed basic freedom[s], nevertheless suffer consistent civil and economic disadvantage under the law for exercising such freedoms" (5).

In this way, religious persecution includes systematic violations of religious freedom, but only in general. It must also include actions which may not be systematic, but occur irregularly (harassment). For example, this may occur if a state does not systematically prohibit the gathering of believers for worship, but arbitrarily disrupts them. Additionally, religious persecution may not always violate religious freedoms, and may occur in an environment that might otherwise guarantee religious freedom (discrimination). Religious minorities, for



instance, may have the right to live and assemble in certain countries, but may still face civic or economic disadvantages as members of their minority faith.

This socio-political definition, along with Marshall's additions, is important for both Christian and secular communities. In many cases, individuals deny that they experience persecution, because they see no cases of brutality or systematic persecution. For instance, some Christians deny the experience of persecution, because they have not been the victims of torture, yet they are forced to worship in secret (Schlossberg 1990:17). When victims of persecution are not aware of their own environment, others might find it difficult to advocate spiritually or politically on their behalf (Marshall 2004–2005:27). Similarly, such unawareness makes it difficult for the international community's efforts to eradicate religious persecution. In cases like these, standards of religious freedom are important, because violations of these standards act as proof of persecution where manifestations such as brutal beatings are not necessarily present. Socio-political definitions are also helpful in providing tangible ways in which to quantify persecution. As a result, quantifying the presence of these actions allows areas where they are a pervading problem to be ranked. This supports the Church and the international community in their efforts to focus prayer and/or action in opposition to religious persecution.

On this second level, then, religious persecution should be understood as:

*An unjust action of varying levels of hostility directed at a believer or believers of a particular religion or belief system through systematic oppression or genocide, or through harassment or discrimination which may not necessarily limit these believers' ability to practice their faith, resulting in varying levels of harm as it is considered from the victim's perspective, each action having religion as its primary motivator.*

### **Level three: Religious persecution of Christians, theologically speaking**

On this third level it must be understood that Christians are not the only religious victims who are persecuted for their beliefs. Muslims in India are persecuted by radical Hindu groups just as much, if not worse, than Indian Christians. Baha'i communities are religiously persecuted in Iran. Tibetan Buddhists and Muslim Uighurs are persecuted in China (27). We could easily list many other examples.

Thus, without mitigating the persecution of non-Christians, and without suggesting that matters of religious freedom are only Christian interests (Blunt 2005:54; El-Hage 2004:3–19), we cannot describe the experience of Christians using only the term “religious persecution.” Obviously, “Christian” must be added in order to most accurately describe the expression of persecution on which the present study focuses.

More than this, we must understand “Christian” to mean “one who believes in, or professes or confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, or is assumed to believe in Jesus Christ ...” (Barrett, Kurian, and Johnson 2001:655). This includes “Christians of all kinds” (“census Christians”), “affiliated Christians” (“member Christians”), “church attenders” (“practicing Christians”), and “Great Commission Christians” (“committed believers”) (655, 651, 655, 662; Marshall 1998:4). The difference between these groups centres on the individual’s level of commitment, and ranges from those who are Christian in name only to those who are actively involved in, and share their faith with, others. This understanding of “Christian” is important, for a perceived lack of commitment by a Christian (“Christians of all kinds”) should not disqualify their experience of religious persecution. Neither should the perceived commitment of a Christian (“Great Commission Christian”) necessarily glorify or substantiate their experience of persecution.

Finally, it is important to distinguish our definition of the religious persecution of Christians from socio-political definitions, like those described above. This is done by understanding our definition theologically (Boyd-MacMillan 2006:85ff). A theological definition of the religious persecution of Christians distinguishes itself by operating, in part, on a theological expectation of persecution. This expectation is a biblical principle whereby all Christians must anticipate persecution. We see this, for instance, in statements from Jesus and the Apostle Paul whereby those who choose to follow Christ must expect persecution (Jn 15:20; 2 Tm 3:12). Biblical statements like these are only accounted for in a theological definition.

Furthermore, on this third level, such a theological definition must also consider aspects of persecution that socio-political definitions, like those discussed above, do not. In this light, genocide, a socio-political part of persecution, becomes martyrdom in a

theological definition. Theologically, we must also go beyond the systematic or irregular presence of any violations of religious freedoms. We must even go beyond the presence of consistent discrimination. Thus a theological definition will also consider actions such as ostracism or ridicule as a part of persecution, and as an expected consequence of following Christ. These actions are not consistently discriminatory, and do not violate religious freedoms, yet when considered theologically, they are religious persecution. In this way, a theological definition of the religious persecution of Christians cannot separate actions of systematic violations from irregular ones, or from actions that do not violate religious freedoms at all.

To illustrate this point, consider the example of a young man who converts from the religion of his parents and family heritage to Christianity (Marshall 2000b:16). Upon doing so, this young man's parents ostracize him from his community and effectively disinherit him from his family. Considered from a socio-political perspective, however unfortunate this situation may be, it does not represent religious persecution. According to international standards, families are allowed to exercise such rights, unless the young man experienced any subsequent physical attack. Such would also be the case for a young girl who is ridiculed by schoolmates for being a Christian. Ridiculing someone is not illegal. Considered theologically, however, these actions do constitute religious persecution, regardless of whether they violate religious freedom or not. The actions of these hypothetical persecutors come as part of an expected consequence of following Christ. While their actions may not necessitate a reaction from the international community, when considered theologically, they require a response from the Church. Such a response may not be directed at the persecutors, but in support of, in these examples, the young man and the school girl. Likewise, these actions demand a theological understanding, and they demand a response from these Christians that may not be required in a socio-political understanding. Thus, the significance of a theological definition of the religious persecution of Christians forces certain examples of persecution to be considered, and to be responded to theologically, that a socio-political definition may not require.

Such a theological definition is important, because it acknowledges the full range in which persecution occurs, be it a systematic violation of religious freedom, an irregular violation, or an irregular,

unjust action that violates no religious freedoms (Boyd-MacMillan 2006:114, 115–116).

This theological consideration, its importance notwithstanding, does however make it nearly impossible to clearly identify areas where religious persecution may be a pervasive problem, and/or to classify areas in which religious freedoms are violated. For this reason, a socio-political definition of religious persecution can accompany a theological definition. While this may be helpful in terms of advocacy, awareness, and support, the presence of a theological definition on this third level must not be forgotten, for only when such a definition is present can we fully understand the religious persecution of Christians, and appropriately reflect on it theologically.

To this end, a theological definition of the religious persecution of Christians follows (“expanded definition”):

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

For purposes of brevity, a “standard definition” understands the religious persecution of Christians to be:

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.

## **A helpful tension**

This theological definition accounts for the full range in which persecution occurs. Yet this range can be difficult to accept, especially for those whose experience of persecution is frequent and intensely hostile. From their perspective, the rather comfortable position of some followers of Christ is hardly a testament of a persecuted Christian. With this in mind, we must clarify that the definition offered above is not meant to cheapen or glorify the experience of those who endure intensely hostile forms of persecution. Neither is it meant to deny the experience of those who endure mildly hostile forms of persecution. A tension exists, then, that may go some way towards filling in what appear to some as gaps between Christian discipleship

and the promised experience of persecution. With this in mind, we can observe that the presence of persecution is universal for all those who seek to follow Jesus Christ. However, even though the presence of persecution may be universal, it seems to be experienced differently by Christians, depending upon their context. In this way, persecution is experienced contextually, insofar as it takes place in different ways, depending on where it occurs and to whom.

### **The universal presence of persecution**

As we noted in our theological definition of the religious persecution of Christians, the New Testament sets forth a theological expectation whereby Christians can anticipate persecution as a part of Christian living. This is what Jesus has in mind when he says, “All men will hate you because of me ...” (Mt 10:22). In the same way, he warns, “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (Jn 15:20). Paul echoes these sentiments when he tells Timothy, “... everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted ...” (2 Tm 3:12). Peter, too, writes, “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you” (1 Pt 4:12). For Peter, expecting persecution meant not being surprised by its presence. Surely these words can apply to believers today, in the same way that they did to their biblical audiences. In fact, we are told that the Church and the Apostles before it stand in continuity with each other and with the Old Testament prophets, through the presence of persecution in their lives (Mt 5:11–12). Consequently, not only was persecution present in the lives of God’s prophets, but it extends through time, as a promise and expectation for all those who seek to follow Christ. From this, we can surmise that the presence of the religious persecution of Christians is universal and ever-present. It cannot be relegated to a specific period, isolated to a specific location, or consigned to a certain group of people. Instead, its presence must be understood as universal not just chronologically, but geographically as well.

If this is so, then the question of normativity arises. If all Christians are persecuted, or are to expect persecution, how often will this occur? Do the biblical statements above indicate a daily experience? Surely, as Christ’s own life, or that of any of the biblical characters illustrates, persecution is not necessarily a day-to-day experience. By not enduring it at any given moment, one need not

question the validity of one's discipleship. Persecution is to be an expected part of every Christian's life, not necessarily an expected part of every Christian's day.

This question of normativity may, however, be posed in a different manner. The late Jonathan Chao, like other Majority World Christians, wondered: "If [persecution] is an essential part of Christian union with Christ, which he intends us to experience, how do we explain the relative lack of [persecution] in churches in the rest of the world [the West]?" He continues: "... has the church in the West and the rest of the 'free world' been deprived of a training course on the way to glory?" (Chao 1984:88). In other words, is the idea of persecution as universally present, however biblical this might be, believable in today's world – a world divided by West and non-West; a culturally-conditioned church on one side, and one that seeks to exist amid tumultuousness on the other? If Scripture understands persecution as an integral part of Christian living and discipleship, are we then to think that the experience of the West and the Majority World is of comparable value? Such questions can only be answered – the universal presence of persecution can only be fully understood – by exploring the contextual experience of persecution.

### **The contextual experience of persecution**

Even if the presence of persecution is universal, the experience of it takes place within a broad, albeit well defined spectrum of manifestations. So, while there may be many shared experiences of persecution throughout the world, persecution ultimately happens differently, depending on where it occurs and to whom. That is, persecution occurs in all areas, but how it is experienced becomes a matter of context. So, Chao's question, quoted above, might better be asked not by wondering *why* persecution apparently does not occur in an area like the West, but by inquiring, "If persecution is an expected part of the Christian life, *how* does it occur in contexts where it does not appear to be as obvious as in other areas like the Majority World?" In other words, the answer to Chao's question may not be found in the presence or absence of persecution, but in reflecting upon the type of persecution endured in a specific context. If we apply the present study's theological definition of religious persecution to a context like the West, a critical eye can see that this context does indeed experience persecution, even if it is almost entirely mildly hostile and less apparent. Similarly, an examination of any cultural context should reveal a certain experience of

persecution. In this light, the contextual experience of persecution – the fact that it occurs differently in different areas – supports the concept that the presence of persecution is universal, and that it occurs to all Christians, however complex or diverse the experience of it might be.

Recognition of persecution as an experience occurring within specific contexts is important if we are to bring further recognition to the universal presence of persecution. In contexts where Christians are under significant pressure, or where it may even be illegal to fully practice their faith, persecution will often manifest itself in intensely hostile ways. Such is often not the case for Christians whose context looks more favorably on religion, specifically Christianity. In these contexts, persecution will most often manifest itself in mildly hostile ways. This is the case for many Christians in the West, where persecution is frequently a matter of discrimination or ridicule, which, understood theologically, can be seen as religious persecution. In this light, the experience of persecution is contextual, but the presence of persecution is universal.

## Conclusion

If we are honest about the current state of theological reflection on religious persecution, we shall have to admit that, with few exceptions, the shortcomings we briefly describe at the beginning of our study suffer from malformed definitions of persecution. By offering a reconsidered definition of the event, we hope to correct these previous limitations.

In closing, it is perhaps worth reiterating here the care we hope to have demonstrated in placing religious persecution – intense and frequent for many, mild and infrequent for others – in the context of a theological expectation and a spectrum of hostility. In the same way, it is important to recognize here that those who might best be able to reflect theologically on religious persecution, and might best be able to fill in some of the gaps that do exist, may be the Majority World Christians who are most intimately familiar with persecution. It is often the case, though, that Christians in this position are unable, or, understandably, are unwilling to give reflection to their painful experiences. Nevertheless, may our study here stimulate more helpful reflection from a greater representation of the global Church. May it help those who experience persecution most frequently and intensely to respond to it with greater clarity and Christ-likeness, and may their cause be given more attention and support by those whose experience of persecution is infrequent and mild.

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## The impact of persecution upon the Igreja Evangelica Congregacional in Angola 1950-1974

**Asaf CN Augusto \***

My interest in the research stems from personal experience of a warring Angola during the 1980's. Growing up in Angola, as an Igreja Evangelica Congregacional in Angola (IECA) pastor's son, I knew fear, social exclusion, and religious alienation.<sup>1</sup> Much of the persecution which the IECA faced during this period of history can be ascribed to the impact of Marxism-Leninism, the political ideology adopted by the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) after independence in 1975.

The hostile attitude adopted by the new independent authorities was itself not a new experience for the IECA; it had known similar forms of treatment under the previous colonial authorities. There are, in fact, several important, albeit general and broad studies that have been conducted on the experience of the IECA during the colonial period. According to these studies, the IECA was founded by The American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Mission (ABCFM), in conjunction with The Congregational Foreign Missionary Society of British North-America, who together worked in the southern central plateau of Angola (i.e., Benguela, Bie, and Huambo) among the Ovimbundus (the main ethnic group of Angola).

However, the period of escalating persecution of 1950-1974 saw the rapid dispersal of members of the IECA into other parts of Angola. This was mainly due to the execution of many of her prominent leaders, the expulsion of foreign missionaries, and the concentrated hostility against her congregations in the central parts of the country.

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<sup>1</sup> The IECA (translated) is the Evangelical Congregational Church of Angola.

Many factors underlie the escalation of persecution against the IECA. So, for instance, a strong emphasis on the education and empowerment of Angolans by the IECA presented a threat to the ideologies and purposes of the colonial authorities (Tucker 1933:85). The Portuguese traders and settlers believed strongly that Angolans were inferior, and therefore incapable of contributing to the development of the country; thus the education of Angolans was decidedly frowned upon. More than that, it was in the best interests of the Portuguese colonial initiative to utilize Angolans as forced labor (Byam 1997:109). Such a situation could justly be described as exploitive and dehumanizing; nonetheless, it constituted a major cornerstone for the colonial development of Angola (Malaquias 2007:35). The lack of universities in Angola in the 1950s forced the IECA to send young Angolans to be equipped in various fields in other parts of the world (Henderson 1990:195-196). One such student who benefited immensely from an IECA scholarship, and subsequently played a vital political role in colonial Angola, was Jonas Savimbi (Marcum 1969:112).<sup>2</sup> Savimbi became a popular political figure, and a major character for Angolan liberation movements; he was sent by the IECA to study medicine in Portugal (Bridgland 1987:32).

Examples such as Savimbi illustrate why the colonial authorities in Angola associated the IECA with anti-colonial factions. As a result, systematic persecution against the Church and her members ensued. Such a turn of events is not surprising when we consider the volatile relationship between the church and the Portuguese authorities since the church's establishment in 1880. The presence and policies of American and Canadian missionaries in the central part of Angola was often viewed as a serious threat to the interests and the future prosperity of Portuguese traders and settlers. Thus, the church was not exempt from harassment from local officials and Portuguese traders who resented the growing presence and influence of the mission schools in the central part of Angola. Thus the persecution intensified between 1950-1975 when the anti-colonial sentiment in the country escalated (Byam1997:97). The colonial government reacted by expelling missionaries, arresting members of the church, and executing some of the clergy, leaving the church without firm leadership.

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<sup>2</sup> Jonas Savimbi studied at mission stations of IECA in Chilessso in 1951 and Dondi in 1954.

## Definitions

This study seeks to draw out the specific implications of the persecution of the IECA for its development in Angola under the colonial authorities between 1950-1974. The development of the IECA under persecution is, ultimately, my interest in the persecution. Thus I will present the situational character of persecution faced by the IECA in the late colonial period 1950-1974.<sup>3</sup>

I should not, of course, be taken aback by the fact that IECA faced such harsh antagonism from the realm of a corrupt system of Portuguese colonialism. Jesus emphatically announced that all ministry work would be met with opposition and persecution (John 15:20). Paul, likewise, told Timothy that “in fact everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12). In order to define persecution, I will employ a biblically informed, theological definition of persecution, which gives a more specific meaning to our understanding of the term. According to Tieszen (2005:20), persecution should be understood as “any unjust action of mild to intense levels of hostility, directed at Christians of varying levels of commitment, resulting in varying levels of harm, which may not necessarily prevent or limit these Christians’ ability to practice their faith appropriately”. Tieszen’s definition, with which I agree, implies that Christians are always suffering some sort of persecution as a result of the nature of their convictions. Nevertheless, despite the unavoidable nature of persecution for Christianity in general, the specific manifestations thereof are significant.

## Hypothesis

The hypothesis underlying the study is that, far from impeding its subsequent growth and development, the IECA’s experience of suffering under colonial domination actually contributed to it, and still does so today. This hypothesis will be tested in the following way:

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to note, however, that the persecution of Christians in Angola did not end after 1974, but simply changed shape as the colonial era came to an abrupt end, and another regime came into being, similarly hostile towards Christianity, albeit for different reasons.

## Method

This study seeks to investigate how, and in what manner, IECA survived the colonial, state-initiated persecutions between 1950 and 1974, and the formative influences (positive and/or negative) of this period of suffering for the subsequent development of the IECA in Angola.

This central research question gives rise to the following subset of questions:

1. What was the historical background of the persecution of the IECA?
2. How did the rise of nationalism influence the intensification of persecution on the IECA?
3. How did the IECA develop under the impact of persecution?
4. What positive and/or negative aspects are associated with the development of the IECA under persecution?
5. How does the IECA's experience fit into the biblical view of the effects of persecution on the church?

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# Disinformation, discrimination, destruction and growth: A case study on persecution of Christians in Sri Lanka

Godfrey Yogarajah\*

## Abstract

The article seeks to examine the trends and patterns of warning, and the stages of metamorphosis, towards violent persecution of the church, and God's redemptive transformation of the situation. Real life experiences and stories are used to illustrate and analyze trends of persecution through a case study of Sri Lanka.

**Keywords** Case study, patterns of persecution, stages of persecution, church growth under persecution.

As dusk creeps over the village of Tissamaharama, routine activity is taking place in a humble village home. A man is playing with his 11-month old son, while his wife cooks a simple evening meal. This serene, peaceful atmosphere is disturbed as two men walk into the home and ask for Pastor Lionel Jayasinghe. Disregarding the presence of the 11-month old infant, the intruders thrust a shotgun into Pastor Lionel's mouth, and pull the trigger.

A former Buddhist monk, who came to know the Lord through a discarded tract, Pastor Lionel graduated from Bible College, and served in Tissamaharama in the deep south of Sri Lanka for five years before he was brutally murdered. He was the first Christian worker to venture into this predominantly Buddhist area where there was no Christian presence.

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A cross was erected to mark his grave. It was the only cross to be found in this area, which stretches for 50 miles, and is inhabited by nearly a million people. This cross was to become the symbol of the living Christ who changed the lives of many through the widow of this martyr. His blood was to become the seed stock of revival in the deep south of Sri Lanka.<sup>1</sup>

Pastor Lionel's story is not an isolated incident. The persecution of Christians worldwide is growing and intensifying. The modes of persecution vary from discrimination to severe assault, imprisonment, arson, looting, torture, rape, and even death. At this very moment, more than 200 million Christian believers worldwide suffer persecution simply because they profess that Jesus Christ is Lord (cf. Marshall 2008). I understand persecution as defined in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: "Persecution is the suffering of pressure, mental, moral, or physical; which authorities, individuals, or crowds inflict on others, for (one's) opinions or beliefs, with a view to their subjection by recantation, silencing, or, as a last resort, execution."

Along with Pastor Lionel, in Sri Lanka, many others such as Pastor Rohan Dissanayake, Pastor Vasu Sritharan, Father Michael Rodrigo, Rev. Nallathamby Gnanaseelan, Father Jim Brown, and Pastor Neil Edirisinghe have been martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ. In recent years, the violence and persecution of Christians has been more widespread in this country.<sup>2</sup>

Sri Lanka is home to 20 million people, comprising the world's main faiths – Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. Introduced in 247 BC to Sri Lanka, Buddhism still remains the majority religion, and a dominant influence shaping culture, language, government, and almost every sphere of Sri Lankan life. Christianity was introduced to Sri Lanka by the Portuguese, Dutch, and British

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<sup>1</sup> This event took place on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1988. The story has been extensively documented by the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL). The writer personally visited and interviewed the widow.

<sup>2</sup> [www.srilankanchristians.com](http://www.srilankanchristians.com) collects incident reports. The editors are a group of concerned Christian citizens from a variety of ethnic traditions and diverse denominations, who have come together for the common purpose of ensuring freedom of religion, worship, and practice for Christians in Sri Lanka, and to be a voice for those whose rights are violated. NCEASL has been monitoring and documenting acts of persecution in Sri Lanka since 1987.

colonial powers (1505–1948) and is viewed and portrayed even today as a tool of colonialism. This view is particularly promoted by Buddhist nationalists (cf. Harris 2006; Vasanthakumar 2001).

Since the 1990s, the country has witnessed an upsurge in anti-Christian sentiments, to the degree that anti-Christian activity is a strong, organized movement today.

According to officials of the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL), an organization that has been closely monitoring anti-Christian activity in the country,<sup>3</sup> “it is common to see a routine prototype to persecution which generally takes place in three phases – disinformation, discrimination and destruction.”<sup>4</sup>

## Disinformation

During the past decade, the propaganda of the extremist Buddhist lobby began flexing its muscles in bold and innovative ways. In 1991 the Presidential Commission on Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs)<sup>5</sup> was commissioned to investigate accusations of corruption against NGOs. However, the commission turned into a façade to investigate churches and Christian organizations. Proceedings were conducted in public, and were given wide publicity in the media. Immunity from defamation permitted wide, unsubstantiated accusations, and irresponsible reporting. This exercise fanned widespread opposition to Christianity.

In 2002, an anti-Christian newspaper, the *Buddhist Times*, was launched. This colourful monthly tabloid carries distorted and inflammatory articles, and vivid pictures, portraying Christianity as an enemy of Buddhist culture and religion (eg. Dhammika 2004).

During the past decade, a very successful media disinformation campaign has intensified, with distorted reports in print, radio, and television. Christians are systematically robbed of their good

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<sup>3</sup> [www.nceaslanka.com](http://www.nceaslanka.com)

<sup>4</sup> A similar structure was discussed by the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission. This specific structure (the three Ds) was conceived by NCEASL in 2003.

<sup>5</sup> The report published by the government was not made available to the general public. However, proceedings were reported in Sri Lankan news papers.

reputation and the right to answer allegations made against them. Some of the false allegations which have been given media publicity include articles accusing Christians of being engaged in unethical conversions, supporting the terrorist movement, destroying and desecrating Buddhist holy objects, pornography, child abuse, promoting western ideology, and wilfully defaming the Buddha. Sadly, Christian responses, clarifications, or challenges to these reports are never published.

The hostility generated by the disinformation campaign has resulted in the criminal expression of hatred against Christians. Churches, and homes of Christians, are burned down, and Christian workers harassed or assaulted. During 2003–2005, the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL) recorded over 250 violent attacks and incidents of anti-Christian activity.<sup>6</sup>

This disinformation campaign reached a climax in December 2003. The death of a popular Buddhist monk, Ven. Soma Thero, on the 12th December 2003 became the rallying point for a brilliantly engineered hate campaign against the Christian community. The Ven. Thero died of heart failure – a fact which was confirmed by a team of eminent doctors (all Buddhists). However, a media and poster campaign created mass hysteria, claiming that Christians had murdered the monk (Wickremesinha 2003:1).

There was a plot to unleash violence on Christians after the monk's funeral on Christmas Eve. Fearing a religious riot and mass destruction, the country's president issued a directive to mobilize security for all Christian churches. Many churches held Christmas worship services with armed police or army personnel standing guard. Fearing attack, Christians in some areas cancelled Christmas services, and pastors were evacuated to safety. That Christmas, approximately twenty churches were attacked or torched in spite of tight security.<sup>7</sup>

There were no celebrations, no Christmas carols, and no decorations. Christmas 2003 in Sri Lanka was spent perhaps in the manner it should be celebrated – without the frills of commercialism, but rather in fervent prayer.

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<sup>6</sup> Incident Reports compiled by the NCEASL Records since 1987 to date are in possession of NCEASL.

<sup>7</sup> NCEASL Incident Reports.



The resultant hate-wave was a shot in the arm for Buddhist nationalism. It became a fresh platform to call for legislation banning conversions, and preventing the construction of churches. Based on the extensive previous phase of persecution through disinformation, it was a step forward to a very effective second phase of persecution – that of discrimination.

## Discrimination

The Christian community has been relegated to ‘second class citizens’, and made to feel like outcasts, guilty of shameful deeds. They have poorer legal, social, economic, and political standing than those who profess the majority religion. Every Christian is viewed with suspicion, a traitor to his people and nation.

Discrimination towards Christians takes place in many forms, with many of their fundamental rights denied. There are brutal attacks on Christian places of worship, including threats which prevent Christians from attending church. Aided by the police, Buddhist monks have issued illegal orders to close down churches.<sup>8</sup> Often there is police inaction when complaints are made regarding attacks or threats. Judges in lower courts increasingly view Christian activity with suspicion. There are instances of refusal to permit burial of Evangelical Christians in public burial grounds.<sup>9</sup> Evangelical Christian children are refused admission to schools, or there is the insistence that they study Buddhism, and participate in Buddhist religious observances. Building permits to construct churches are denied.<sup>10</sup> Even when permits are issued, the local monk prevents construction. Often there is the refusal to sell land or rent premises to Christians. Christians also encounter biased legal opinion and economic embargoes which prevent labourers from working in the fields of Christians.

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<sup>8</sup> Example: Assemblies of God Church, Bolatha, Gampaha District, as reported in the NCEASL Incident Report of the 6<sup>th</sup> February 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Example: Plight of a Christian family, Reindapola, Lunugala, Uva Province, as reported in the NCEASL Incident Report of the 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Example: Foursquare Gospel Church, Kelaniya, Gampaha District, as reported in NCEASL Incident Report, 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2008.

## Anti-Conversion Law

In January 2004, a newly formed party of Buddhist monks, the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), won nine seats in parliament, and as of 2008 the JHU is part of the ruling coalition government. Their campaign promise was to introduce anti-conversion legislation.<sup>11</sup>

The draft Bill for 'Prohibition of Forcible Conversion' was tabled in Parliament in July 2004. This was challenged in the Supreme Court by Christian and civil groups, at a high profile hearing on the 6th and 9th August 2004. Except for two clauses in the Bill, the Supreme Court determined that the rest were constitutional. As such, this bill could now be passed in parliament with a simple majority. The passing of this bill will result in legalized discrimination against Christians (cf. Owens 2006).

## Destruction

The situation in Sri Lanka has entered the third phase of persecution, following disinformation and discrimination. In this stage, persecution takes place with impunity, without the normal protective measures of the law.

In 2003, 91 churches were attacked, demolished, or set ablaze.<sup>12</sup> This year (2008), to date, there have been over twenty reported incidents. Approximately 140 churches have closed down, either because no one will sell or rent a building to them, or because they are not allowed to continue ministry in that locality. There are pastors who are struggling to survive, not knowing where their next meal will come from. These are the poor rural pastors who survive on part of the tithes of the people. When the church is forced to close down, or they are forced to flee their homes, the pastor has no means of supporting his family. A few have been able to move to other villages and start afresh, while some others have found new and creative methods of pastoring.

## Persecution and growth

Often there is a correlation between persecution and church growth. This is true in the case of Sri Lanka. During the past decade, the Church has grown tremendously<sup>13</sup>, and this growth has attracted

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<sup>11</sup> This is not stated on their website.

<sup>12</sup> NCEASL Incident Report 2003.

<sup>13</sup> See Johnstone and Mandryk (2001:587-588) on church growth in Sri Lanka. Also NCEASL National Church Survey 1998 and 2001.

hostility. Today, amidst persecution, and through ashes, the church continues to grow. The Church of the Living God is the community of believers among whom He dwells. Though the building can be destroyed, the body of Christ cannot be destroyed by human hands.

Were Pastor Lionel's murderers successful in ending a ministry with the death of this Pastor? No. His widow, Sister Lalani, returned from the funeral of her husband, and vowed never to leave the place, nor the cause for which her husband gave his life. She continued where he left off. When the church leadership offered to move her to a safe location, she told them, "Every time I see the blood stains of my husband splattered all over my house, each stain gives me courage to stay on and continue the vision for which he gave his life".

She remained with her infant son, and continued the ministry amidst threats, intimidation, and attacks. She faced death threats; her church was set on fire, destroying the roof; five bombs were placed in the church, but miraculously some did not explode, and those that did, did not cause much damage; she has been surrounded by mobs, and threatened; and on several occasions her home was stoned throughout the night.

But in spite of it all, Lalani stayed on, trusting God. The area where she ministers, in the deep South, is an area very resistant to the Gospel. Christian penetration was very low, as this was a citadel of idol worship – a stronghold of Hindu and Buddhist deities, who are revered, feared, and worshipped by millions. Even the British colonial rulers did not penetrate this area during their 150 year rule. But this courageous woman of God stays on, building on the foothold gained by her husband.

Lalani walks several miles a day ministering to the needy, sometimes spending the night in believers' homes because of a lack of public transport. Signs and wonders have accompanied her powerful ministry.

There is a congregation of 300 in the church she pastors, and over one thousand believers in the Tissamaharama area. She has established branch churches all over the Southern Province. These are the fruits of her faithful ministry among the people for whom her husband died.

The week before Pastor Lionel was murdered, those who instigated his murder had said, “We should have cut down this tree (his ministry) with our fingernail while it was small, but now we have to use an axe.”

Today, no human weapon can cut down this mighty tree that God has nurtured through this courageous and faithful woman. It has grown beyond the power of human effort or demonic influence. As the Lord said: “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone; but if it die, it brings forth much fruit” (John12:24).

### **Pioneer of ‘Night Church’**

On the 17th September 2003, Sister Veena and three other female Christian workers were attacked in the small village where they ministered. More than thirty men broke into their house during the night, and assaulted them. It was the Hand of God that saved these four young women from brutal rape. They were dragged out of the house, kicked, and forced to march to the local police station. All along the way, the men kicked them, shouting aloud that they had raided a house of ill fame and had caught four prostitutes. At the police station, the bruised and terrified women were produced as prostitutes. They were humiliated and traumatized. The little church Veena pastored was demolished. But human hands could not crush her spirit and her firm commitment to fulfil her calling. Veena continued her ministry, risking her life, visiting Christians at night in secret, and leaving before dawn. She pioneered the concept of ‘night church’.<sup>14</sup>

### **Hope for the future**

On the 25th September 2003, a Church in Kesbewa was set ablaze during the night. The Church was completely destroyed. All that remained of the building was its damaged outer walls. One month before this incident, a hand grenade was thrown at the church. A young man from the congregation, who was guarding the church from attackers, was injured. After the fire, the congregation was forced to

<sup>14</sup> Original Source: NCEASL Incident Report 2003. Also *Concern magazine*, September-December 2003:8.

abandon the Church building. They were under threat, and had no safe place to meet. The gutted Church building was closely watched by 'informants', who monitored the movements of the believers, ensuring that they did not return to worship or re-build the church.

A year after the church was set ablaze, the congregation began to meet again on the steps of the roofless church for Bible study. On Sundays, over forty children sit on the floor listening to Bible stories. When it rains, the children hold umbrellas. Oblivious of discomfort and danger, they embody the true spirit and steadfast faith of the persecuted Church.

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## Sri Lanka religious freedom profile

### Statistics\*

Population	19.7 million
GDP	\$93.33 billion
GDP per capita	\$4,600
Buddhist	69%
Hindu	15%
Christian (mostly Catholic)	8%
Muslim (mostly Sunni)	7%
Other	1%
Religious Freedom Rating <sup>1</sup>	5
Government Regulation of Religion Index (GRI)	6.1
Government Favoritism of Religion Index (GFI)	5.5
Social Regulation of Religion Index (SRI)	9.5

### Background

Ethnic Sinhalese arrived in Sri Lanka late in the sixth century BCE, probably from northern India. Buddhism was introduced into Sri Lanka beginning in about the mid-third century BCE. By the time Portuguese Roman Catholics arrived in 1505, they encountered three

\* Reprinted with friendly permission by The Center for Religious Freedom from Paul A Marshall (ed.) *Religious Freedom in the World* Lanham: Rowman 2008, 371-374.

<sup>1</sup> The whole number score for religious freedom, which is on a scale from 1-7, is derived from the answers to questions submitted to country reviewers and refined in a collaborative process. The scores marked GRI, GFI, and SRI are calculated from answers to the questions in the Grim & Finke (2006) International Religious Indexes Questionnaire. The best score is 0, the worst score attained by any of the 110 countries measured is slightly above 10. (Footnote compiled by editors).

main kingdoms: ethnic Tamils from southern India had established a base in the north, while the ethnic Sinhalese had two long-standing kingdoms based in the southwest.

In 1815, the British became the first European power to conquer the entire island. Sri Lanka achieved peaceful independence in 1948. Since independence, political power has mostly alternated between the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), both of which are majority Sinhala Buddhist and both of which have had to contend with an enduring ethnic conflict.

The conflict initially pitted several Tamil guerrilla groups against the government, which is dominated by the Sinhalese majority. The first post-independence outbreak of ethnic rioting occurred in 1956 after parliament passed an act that made Sinhala the sole official language of administration and education and ushered in an era of widespread discrimination against minority Tamils. In the early 1980s, a Tamil guerrilla attack on an army patrol sparked widespread and very bloody anti-Tamil rioting. The deaths of thousands of civilians energized the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the main guerilla force advocating for an independent Tamil homeland, and resulted in decades of open civil war. The militarily outnumbered LTTE frequently employed child soldiers, brutal assassinations, and guerilla tactics and pioneered the use of concealed suicide-bomb vests. The Sri Lankan government has been guilty of widespread human rights violations, covert support of kidnappings and extrajudicial killings by paramilitaries, and indiscriminate use of artillery and air attacks.

After nearly two decades of war without a clear victor, the government signed a cease-fire with the LTTE in 2001. The unprecedented destruction caused by the December 2004 tsunami ushered a respite in hostilities. However, because of a widespread boycott in Tamil-majority areas, Sinhala hard-liner Mahinda Rajapakse (SLFP) was elected president in November 2005, and the cease-fire began to unravel. Rampant violence is once again a daily fact of Sri Lankan life in a conflict that has already killed more than 65,000 people since 1983. The LTTE has effective control of large areas in the north and east of the country. An estimated 350,000 internally displaced refugees remain unwilling or unable to return to the northeast, while at least 500,000 were displaced as a result of the tsunami.



Direct elections for Sri Lanka's president and unicameral parliament are open to multiple parties but continue to be marred by some irregularities, violence, and intimidation. The LTTE generally refuses to allow free elections in the areas under its control. Official corruption is a growing concern. Independent media outlets can generally express their views openly, but state-run media have been used by the government for political ends. The LTTE does not permit free expression in the areas under its control. Journalists have also faced intimidation from government sources. Except in conflict-affected areas, human rights and social welfare nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) generally operate freely. However, the LTTE does not allow for freedom of association in the regions under its control.

The rule of law remains somewhat weak, and there has been little progress in reducing acts of torture by the security forces and police. Tamils maintain that they face systematic discrimination in several matters controlled by the state. Rape and domestic violence remain serious problems. Freedom House's 2007 Freedom in the World rates Sri Lanka a 4 in political rights and a 4 in civil liberties.

## Religious freedom

Theravada Buddhism differs markedly from the better-known (in the West) Tibetan or Chinese Mahayana Buddhism. It is more strongly linked to the orthodoxy of early Buddhist texts and is hostile to any perceived dilution of Buddhist purity. This is particularly true in Sri Lanka, where many believe that Buddha himself entrusted the fate of "pure" Buddhism to the care of the majority Sinhalese people with Sri Lanka as its sanctuary. This melding of ethnic, religious, and political identity (especially post-independence) has resulted in an explosive strain of religious militancy – that justifies violence in the name of protecting Buddhism from corruption, especially from foreign peoples and foreign religions.

This fear of outsiders grew in part from repeated subjugation by foreign invaders, as typified by the 16th-century Portuguese occupation and then the Dutch Calvinists who replaced them in the 17th century. Both carried out campaigns of religious conversion and at times resorted to force to achieve their ends. Much of the island came under control of yet another foreign power, the British, in 1796.

While more tolerant of native religion and customs, the British system still granted power and privilege to those adopting Western styles, which were strongly correlated with Christianity. Many Sinhalese chauvinists still see ethnic Tamils in the north as long-standing invaders with a different language, religion, and customs that threaten Sri Lanka's native identity.

This fear of a majority culture besieged by minorities has resulted in large-scale violence in the past 70 years. In 1959, Theravada Buddhist monks assassinated Sri Lankan Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike because he was perceived to be backing away from protecting the privileged place of Sinhala Buddhism, a move prompted by widespread violence after "Sin-hala-only" language reforms. This violent episode is emblematic of a radicalism that many find difficult to harmonize with common Western stereotypes of pacifist Buddhist monks.

In 1978, Buddhist chauvinists won a significant legal and political victory when Article IX of the new constitution granted Buddhism "the foremost place" and gave the state the duty to "protect and foster" it. Although it would take many years for the full legal effects to be felt, the notion that the state should be "on the side" of Buddhism blossomed, as did political Buddhism.

Although Article X of the constitution asserts that every person is entitled to the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including "the right to have or adopt a religion of one's choice and to manifest that religion in public or private," the harsh reality is a government that practices legal discrimination against non-Buddhists and tolerates violence against religious minorities, particularly Christians. Two watershed events illustrate both aspects of the problem.

In the summer of 2003, a group of Catholic nuns sought legal incorporation for their religious order, whose mission included education, providing social services, and teaching their faith. Legal objections were lodged against this request based on the allegation that it would violate the constitution's protection of Buddhism. The case (*In re Sisters of the Holy Cross in Menzingen*) was referred to the Supreme Court, which held that "the constitution does not recognize a fundamental right to propagate a religion" and that "the propagation and spreading of Christianity ... would impair the very existence of Buddhism." After the nuns petitioned for a reversal of the decision, the United Nations found a clear violation of international law. However, in an

equally stunning move, the Supreme Court explicitly rejected the binding authority of UN decisions, which is guaranteed by its treaty obligations. The end result is that religious minorities can no longer gain legal recognition of their right to educate in the faith, carry out charitable activities, own and acquire property, or legally exist as institutions.

The *Holy Cross* decision was also culturally significant in that it heightened religious tensions in echoes of the Sinhala-only acts. The state itself had now “taken sides” and labeled common Christian activity as not only contrary to the constitution but also a threat to the very existence of Buddhism.

In late 2003 also came the death of Gangodawila Soma Thero, a very popular anti-Christian monk who had railed against Buddhist conversion to other religions. Although his death was proven to be from natural causes, many Buddhist monks propagated the idea that he was assassinated by Christian forces backed by foreign NGOs. His very public and provocative burial on Christmas Eve sparked an unprecedented wave of anti-Christian violence and church burnings. Since then, there have been nearly 200 violent attacks, including dozens of church firebombings and desecrations, yet arrests of perpetrators are few and prosecutions even rarer.

Radical Buddhists are seeking direct criminal sanctions against Christians and other religious minorities who practice common aspects of their faith. Specifically, these militants repeatedly hold “fasts unto death” in agitation for anti-conversion laws that would outlaw “inducing” voluntary conversion out of Buddhism. “Spreading the faith,” a goal common to Christianity, Islam, and many other faiths, would be punishable by five to seven years in prison.

Anti-conversion laws have come close to passing since the April 2004 elections left the country without a majority government and marked, for the first time, the entry of extremist Buddhist monks into political office under the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) banner. In recent elections the SLFP government has welcomed the JHU as a coalition partner, thus giving them power as a swing vote. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has put Sri Lanka on its “watch list” of religious freedom violators.

## Religious liberty on the web portal of a national evangelical alliance

A documentation on the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka

As a complement to the article of Godfrey Yogarajah on Sri Lanka, the editors have chosen to document the activities of one Evangelical Alliance in Asia on behalf of religious liberty in their country and region. It is striking to observe how the intervention in the areas of Religious Liberty/Human Rights and Peace/Reconciliation are intertwined. The Alliance members raise their voice for a murdered pastor as well as for executed Red Cross workers or expelled Tamil labourers. They mobilise Christians in interdenominational cooperation as well as for prayer and fasting. They report on individual cases as well as addressing public policy issues. They also look beyond their own country by hosting a Training of Trainers Seminar on the theology of persecution for Christian leaders from other Asian countries. The following are excerpts from the NCEASL website Sri Lanka <[www.nceaslanka.com](http://www.nceaslanka.com)> , accessed on 26 July 2008.<sup>1</sup> [CS]

### 1. Self-portrayal of NCEASL on the web

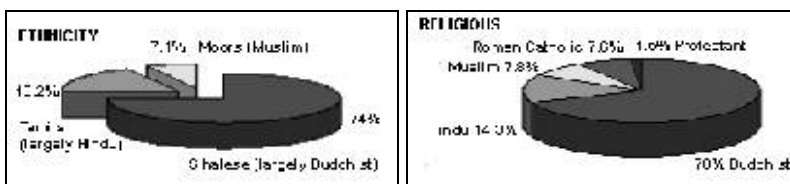


The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL) was founded in 1952 to serve the national church. Today the Alliance has grown significantly and continues to impact the lives of many. NCEASL's membership consists of 5 Christian denominations, 74 Churches and Christian organizations representing more than 200,000 Evangelical Christians in Sri Lanka. In keeping with our vision of "Unifying the Church to Transform the Nation", our services and

<sup>1</sup> The intention to report in equal measure about corresponding activities on the web of other Christian networks in Sri Lanka had to be abandoned due to lack of material. Cf. National Council of Churches calls for creation of inter-religious mechanism to facilitate religious harmony <http://tinyurl.com/5gf65f>; Statement by the Catholic Bishops' Conference in Sri Lanka on the Proposed Anti-Conversion Legislation 14.01.2004 <http://www.archdioceseofcolombo.com/AntiConBillSt2002.php>

ministries are geared towards transforming lives, communities and our nation through pro-active intervention in five broad areas:

- Missions, Evangelism and Theology
- Religious Liberty and Human Rights
- Social Development, Relief and Rehabilitation
- HIV/AIDS Awareness
- Peace and Reconciliation



Sri Lanka is an island republic located off the Indian subcontinent. It is home to 20 million people from diverse ethnic backgrounds of which the majority is Sinhalese Buddhist. Sri Lanka has been the ground of vicious ethnic conflict for over two decades. The war has brought about untold suffering and the loss of over 100,000 lives. In 2004, the coastal areas of the island were battered by the fierce Asian Tsunami, claiming over 40,000 lives. The waves also took away livelihoods, homes and belongings, marring the souls of the living.

In a land where all hope seems to be lost, we endeavour to reach out to the needy, amidst challenges and religious persecution, by bringing hope and proclaiming the good news to the poor.

<http://www.nceaslanka.com/about%20us.htm>

### Religious liberty and human rights

- Our advocacy and lobbying campaigns on behalf of the suffering Church encompass both local and international audiences including governments, human rights organizations, Churches and the public at large. We have consistently alerted the local and international community about the plight of Christians undergoing persecution both in Sri Lanka and other Asian nations
- We regularly monitor, investigate and document attacks on Churches and other anti-Christian activities.
- We provide legal aid, advice and counseling to Pastors and Christians who are victims of violence.

- We conduct training seminars to educate Pastoral workers on best practices in ministry and Biblical teaching on facing persecution. These seminars offer encouragement and important training for Pastors who serve in difficult circumstances facing constant threats.
- Through our Emergency Relief measures, we provide practical assistance to victims of Church attacks in the form of food, clothing, medical aid, shelter and transportation.
- We provide Pastors' children, who live in hostile environments or who are facing persecution, scholarships for educational needs. At our camp for children, they learn how to stand strong amidst the turmoil.

<http://www.nceaslanka.com/religious%20liberty.htm>

### **Peace and reconciliation**

We believe that each one of us is called to be a peace maker in our wounded nation. Our peace building initiatives include Seminars and Workshops bringing people of different ethnic communities together, poster and postcard campaigns promoting the message of peace and Peace Kite Festival.

- "Give Peace a Chance" Peace Expedition 14 - 17 May 2007
- Holistic Development Workshop 14 - 15 December 2006
- Kite Festival 25 January 2006

<http://www.nceaslanka.com/peace-&-reconciliation.htm>

## **2. Web postings on religious liberty, human rights, and reconciliation**

### **Fasting and prayer programme in Galle**

17 March 2008 [...] Since 2005 EASL has been motivated to conduct fasting and prayer meetings through the south region. Reasons for this have been the crying need for unity in the church and in the nation. If there were to be unity it is imperative that the church be united. On the 17th of March 2008 was a historic occasion when over 3500 Christians in the southern region united to cry out to God and intercede for our nation which had plunged into darkness. [...] Some of the special invitees were from other religious faiths, politicians and

public administration. [...] Through this event many non Christians came to know about the role of Christians in this nation. [...] The situation in the south was quiet tense with sporadic bomb blasts. Therefore the need for tight security was of high priority. The Police had banned public meetings due to the volatile situation in the country. However after NCEASL had meetings with the Police and ensured them about the security arrangements that would be present on the day, the Police agreed to let the programme go ahead as planned. [...]

<http://tinyurl.com/Someuv>

### **Pastor Neil Edirisinghe shot dead in Ampara**

Pastor Neil Edirisinghe (37 years) of the House Church Foundation was engaged in ministry in Ampara for many years. On the night of 17th February 2008, at approximately 9.30 pm, he was brutally gunned down outside his house by two men who had arrived on a motorcycle. The family had just returned home after visiting friends, where they had enjoyed a meal. The attackers also shot his wife Shiromi (aged 31 years) in the stomach. She is received treatment in hospital and her condition is critical. Their 2 year old baby son is suffering from severe trauma and it is reported that he also suffered a minor injury. Pastor Neil made the supreme sacrifice for the Gospel.

The Police have reported that they have arrested 4 persons in connection with the murder. Two of them are Gramarakshaka Niladhari (Home Guards) - an auxiliary force established by the government to assist the Police and military in security and military duties and another is a businessman from the area. According to Police investigations, this was a contract killing.

Some prominent persons in the area [are] accepting the Gospel and began attending Pastor Neil's Church, which angered certain persons who conspired to have him killed. The pastor had been receiving threatening phone calls for about 6 months.

The funeral of the martyred pastor will be held on Thursday 21st February in Ampara where he served and died.

NCEASL condemns this senseless and violent act in the strongest terms and call for justice.

## Pastor Neil laid to rest

*Father forgive them, for they know not what they do*

On the 21st February 2008, the mortal remains of Pastor Neil Edirisinghe were laid to rest in Ampara where 4 days earlier he was murdered by gunmen who shot him and his wife. A crowd of over 1,000 Pastors and leaders from all over the country representing different denominations gathered to pay their last respects to this martyr. While his coffin was laid in the grave, his wife Shiromi lay unconscious in the Intensive Care Unit of the Ampara Base Hospital fighting for her life. Their 1 1/2 year old son played; too young to comprehend what was happening around him.

The funeral was organized by the Pastors fellowship of Ampara. In spite of the prevailing tension in the Ampara area the small community of Christians demonstrated courage and boldness. The prayer that went up to the heavens was that the blood of this martyr will become the seed of the Church in Ampara.

Thank you for your solidarity and prayers. Please continue to pray:

- For Shiromi's healing, that God will restore her physically and emotionally.
- For their little son, that God will erase the terror and confusion of that night from his memory; that he will be surrounded by love at this time when he is separated from both his parents.
- For justice; that investigations and trial of accused will take place unhampered and unbiased.
- For the members of the Late Pastor Neil's congregation, for courage and protection as some of them face threats of violence.

<http://tinyurl.com/6m9olc>

## **[Statement by the] National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka: Pastor Neil Edirisinghe shot dead in Ampara**

On the 17th of February 2008, Pastor Neil Edirisinghe was killed by gunmen outside his home in Ampara. His wife was also shot, causing critical injury. She was carrying their baby son at the time she was shot.

We are deeply saddened and shocked by this act of senseless violence. We pray for the pastor's family and especially for his wife,



for healing her physical wounds and the deep emotional pain caused by the murder of her husband.

Whatever religion or race we belong to, all of us who live in this country must hang our heads in shame; for we have created a society where human life has been devalued so much that human beings have become a dispensable commodity and mere statistic. It is high time that we as a nation realize that differences between individuals and communities cannot be resolved with extreme and violent reactions.

The District of Ampara has been experiencing religious tension and some incidents of religiously motivated violence such as acts of arson, threats and intimidation. The killing of Pastor Edirisinghe which was the culmination of these unchecked incidents has raised concern as to the safety of the small Christian community in Ampara. We call upon the IGP to ensure that Christians in Ampara are free to exercise their faith and engage in worship without fear or intimidation.

Organized attempts by any individual or group to breed religious tension and incite religious hatred - be it in Ampara or anywhere else, must be condemned by all right thinking people irrespective of religious affiliation and calls for urgent action by the Government to put a stop to this ugly trend.

It is disturbing to see the widening gulf between the ethnic groups in our country confounded by the erosion of trust between religious communities. Recent media reports on the arrest of a Pastor for alleged involvement in LTTE activity has seen a veil of suspicion drawn over Christians. It is the sacred duty of the Government and the law enforcement authorities to conduct impartial investigations and deal with any guilty party under the law and release without prejudice those who are found innocent.

We strongly condemn the murder of Pastor Neil Edirisinghe and the attack on his family. We call upon the IGP and the Police force in Ampara for immediate and impartial investigation whereby those responsible for this crime will be dealt with under the law.

We pray for the restoration of peace and understanding between communities and individuals in our nation.

<http://tinyurl.com/5dvmxn>

### **Forced expulsion of Tamils from lodges in Colombo**

On 7th June 2007 hundreds of Tamil civilians living in lodges in Wellawatte, Pettah and other areas in Colombo were forcibly evicted and escorted out of the city by military personnel. The shocking move caused panic, outrage and anger. There was heightened fear among those who were being forcibly evicted as they were not told of their destination.

It is a shameful and short sighted act, blatantly in violation of the fundamental right to equality and freedom of movement, guaranteed under Articles 12 and 14 (1) (h) of the Constitution of Sri Lanka.

This move is attributed to the statement made by the Inspector General of Police of Sri Lanka, on the 1st of June, that Tamil people cannot remain in Colombo without a valid reason and that those who cannot provide a valid reason for their stay will be provided transport to their places of origin in the North and East of Sri Lanka.

[...] This move was challenged by a fundamental rights petition filed in the Sri Lanka Supreme Court by the Centre for Policy Alternatives. In a welcome move, the Supreme Court on 8th June issued an interim order directing the Police chief to stop forced eviction of Tamils in Colombo and to allow Tamil citizens free entry and exit to and from the City of Colombo.

[...] We welcome the order of the Supreme Court which reaffirms the principle of equality enshrined in the Constitution of Sri Lanka and call upon the government to ensure equal protection of the law to all citizens.

<http://www.nceaslanka.com/peace-&-reconciliation.htm>

### **Statement on the execution of two Sri Lanka Red Cross workers**

The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL) strongly condemns the abduction and execution of two volunteer staff members of the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society on 1st June 2007.

Sinnarasa Shanmugalingam (32) and Karthequesu Chandramohan (26) were abducted in the heart of Colombo, at the Fort Railway station, while returning to Batticaloa after attending a training workshop in Colombo. The Civil Monitoring Committee in a local news report published names and details of 117 persons who remain

missing after abduction in 2006 and 2007. It is inexcusable that, in a democracy, civilians continue to be abducted and executed in this manner.

Norms of International Law require all parties in a given conflict to refrain from any act that may jeopardize humanitarian activities and the lives of humanitarian workers. We note with great dismay that Sri Lanka now holds the dubious reputation of being a nation that executes humanitarian workers. The shameful incident of the murder of 17 aid workers from Action Against Hunger in 2006 in Muttur still remains unsolved.

We call upon the government of Sri Lanka for an immediate, transparent investigation into the murders of the Red Cross workers and bring the perpetrators of this crime to justice.

We also call upon all parties to end this vicious cycle of abductions, violence and cold-blooded murder.

We call upon the government and the LTTE to a negotiated settlement and bring to an end this senseless violence which is destroying the very heart of our beloved country.

<http://tinyurl.com/5gb2p3>

### **Bill for the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion***

26 July 2006 – The Sri Lankan Parliament is considering the proposed Anti-Conversion Bill (mentioned above) which has now passed its 2nd Reading. Presently, the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversions Bill* is being considered by a Standing Committee of Parliamentarians.

On the 23rd of May 2006, a three member delegation from NCEASL made oral and written submissions to the Parliamentary Standing Committee which is considering this Bill, objecting to the proposed Bill being made law.

The Bill will next be taken up for voting in Parliament, where it can be passed and made law with a simple majority.

As it is, with no such law in place, there is wide spread harassment and intimidation of Christians, forced closure of Churches and physical attacks on Christian citizens.

Such a law will only serve to legitimize rampant harassment of minority Christians and violation of the right to religion and worship.

NCEASL reiterates our stand that the Bill - even with amendments - will only serve to legitimize harassment of minority Christians and violation of the right to religion and worship.

<http://tinyurl.com/66pa2d>

### **“These laws are a threat to the entire Christian community”: Christians of all denominations rally together to protest anti-conversion laws**

A special rally facilitated by 'Solidarity for Religious Freedom' and the Catholic Diocese of Chilaw was held on the 7th May 2005, [...]. Over 2,500 people from different Denominations gathered for this meeting. [...] A significant feature of this meeting was that it brought together the Catholic community, Protestant and Evangelical Christian communities, to express objection to the proposed anti-conversion laws.

[...] One of the purposes of the meeting was to educate the Christian public about the practical implications of the proposed anti-conversion laws, the Church's response and the role of Christian citizens within the Sri Lankan community.

The Catholic Bishop of Chilaw [...], addressing the gathering stressed that the threat to religious freedom is not against any one group of Christians, but against the entire Christian community. He further said that some of the proposed laws will violate the rights of all citizens, including Buddhists. [...] *Report on the Public Rally - from NCEASL, 9th May 2005.*

<http://www.nceaslanka.com/downloads.htm>

### **NCEASL General Secretary honoured with Pro Fide Award 2006**

Jerusalem, 18 December 2006 – The International Pro Fide Award was presented to the Rev. Godfrey Yogarajah of Sri Lanka, the General Secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia, for his sacrificial service to the persecuted church [...].

<http://tinyurl.com/67spm6>

### **Statement on the deterioration of the human rights situation in Sri Lanka**

13 November 2006 – The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka expresses its shock and dismay at the events unfolded in the last few days, turning Sri Lanka into a ‘killing field’.

The massacre of unarmed civilians who were taking refuge at an IDP Camp and the subsequent assassination of the Hon. Member of Parliament and Human Rights activist Mr. Nadarajah Raviraj in the very heart of the high security capital, Colombo sent shock waves through the nation.

These are not isolated incidents but the culmination of a violent culture which has been prevalent in Sri Lanka in recent times. [...]

We call upon every right thinking citizen of this nation to stand up, be counted and let their voice be heard, to put a stop to these barbaric acts so that we can once again stand tall as a nation. May God grant us grace and strength to transform our nation, so that we might see justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never failing stream. "Righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a disgrace to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

<http://tinyurl.com/6boe8v>

### **A teaching seminar on the theology of persecution and discipleship: "In the shadow of the cross"**

06 April 2006 – In the shadow of the cross – a seminar on the Biblical theology of persecution and discipleship, organized by the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia (EFA) in partnership with Voice of the Martyrs – Canada (VoM) brought together 34 delegates from 13 countries for a time of learning and sharing. The seminar itself was held [...] in Colombo, Sri Lanka from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> April, 2006. This was a programme for training of trainers (ToT). [...]

Participants from several countries expressed that the seminar topic "A Theology of Persecution and Discipleship" met a long felt need in their country of examining the theological basis for responding to persecution. As in the words of one participant from Pakistan, "We have never looked into this subject in such depth on what the Bible had to say on persecution and discipleship. Also neither our churches, seminaries nor institutions touch on this. This should be part of the curriculum of very Bible college." Every participant pledged to take this teaching to their respective countries and teach this material to the national leadership. [...]

[http://www.efasia.org/news/news\\_view.htm?ano=4](http://www.efasia.org/news/news_view.htm?ano=4)

## **Religious liberty issues on web portals of Evangelical Alliances in Asia**

The Evangelical Fellowship in Asia <[www.efasia.org](http://www.efasia.org)> links websites of its members. Among those that are accessible in English the following contain substantial information on religious freedom and the persecution of Christians. Mostly this focuses on issues in the particular country, while the Australian Religious Liberty section has a global scope. Some sites also offer the material of the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church for download.

### **Sri Lanka <[www.nceaslanka.com](http://www.nceaslanka.com)>**

- Press releases, news

### **India <[www.efionline.org](http://www.efionline.org)>**

- Evangelical Fellowship of India press releases, news and articles (specific category on persecution)
- Christian Legal Association

### **Malaysia <[www.necf.org.my](http://www.necf.org.my)>**

- Annual Report on the State of Religious Liberty
- 15 major Documents from 2001-2008, News

### **Australia <[www.ea.org.au](http://www.ea.org.au)>**

- WEA Religious Liberty News & Analysis (258 entries since 2002)
- WEA Religious Liberty Prayer Postings (489 to date since 1998)
- Weekly Religious Liberty Alert
- Focus on West Papua
- Subscription to above services

*Researched by IIRF 26 July 2008 CS*

## Religious Liberty Trends 2007-2008

of the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission

Elizabeth Kendal\*

### Abstract

The two main issues to dominate religious liberty through 2007 and develop through 2008 are apostasy and the fear thereof, and the New Cold War. The phenomenon of apostasy, eg. Muslims leaving Islam, has increased and become more visible with apostates increasingly publicly claiming their religious liberty themselves. The fearful reaction of the dictators to it, 'apostaphobia', has become more violent. The new geo-political realities in the form of a New Cold War are set to have a profound and negative impact on global religious liberty.

**Keywords** Apostasy, apostates, apostaphobia, postmodernism, new cold war, Middle East

This World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission (WEA RLC) annual Religious Liberty Trends posting will focus on two global trends:

- Apostasy, apostaphobia, and postmodernism
- The *New Cold War*

Most localised trends, tensions, repressions and "hot" conflicts are actually expressions or symptoms of these two global trends.

Apostaphobia may be defined as a consuming, well-founded fear of loss of adherents, which manifests primarily as zealous, uncompromising repression and denial of fundamental liberties – in particular the right to convert – by violent and subversive means.

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While the section on apostasy, apostaphobia, and postmodernism focuses entirely on the phenomenon of Muslim apostates and the apostaphobia of the dictators of Islam, the issue of apostaphobia also applies to India's dictators of Hindutva (Hindu nationalism) who are behind the unprecedented, severe and escalating persecution of Christians in India. For while apostaphobic dictators claim that their apostaphobia is driven by a noble concern for national security and religious purity, tradition and (ironically) "liberty", apostaphobia is actually driven by political ambition and the lure of empowerment through religion. That is why apostaphobia manifests almost exclusively amongst leaders and beneficiaries of sects or organisations that do not separate religion and politics: Islam, Hindutva and various other religious-nationalist forces.

The main focus of this posting, however, is the New Cold War that is coming upon us and is set to have a profound and negative impact on global religious liberty. The trend is going to be for persecution and repression to get a whole lot worse. An 800-word summary entitled "Not by might, nor by power" has been written for the March–May edition of the Australian Evangelical Alliance quarterly magazine, Working Together, which will be available on-line from mid-March.

## **Apostasy, apostaphobia and postmodernism**

In 1989 the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) crushed pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square. The brutality of this repression shook multitudes of Chinese from their apathy and drove them – particularly students, intellectuals and professionals – to reassess atheistic Communism and the CCP's dictatorship. Widespread disillusionment led to widespread rejection of CCP repression and a significant turning to Christ amongst the Chinese elite.

Similarly, globalisation and the revolution in information and communication technologies have exposed Muslims to the reality of Islamic terrorism (such as 9/11), repression (particularly of women), barbarism (such as in public executions), backwardness (widespread poverty and illiteracy, destruction of schools), propaganda and lies (as weapons of war) and irrational hysteria (such as was displayed in the Cartoon Intifada of February 2006). This has shaken many Muslims from their apathy and driven them – particularly students, intellectuals



and professionals – to examine their religion and reassess their faith. Just as in China, widespread disillusionment is leading to apostasy and a not insignificant turning to Christ amongst the Muslim elite.

Presently the exodus from Islam is little more than a trickle, but that is because the dam that holds back the masses is built primarily of fear. One of the most phenomenal trends of 2007 was the eruption into the open and onto the world stage, not of the issue of apostasy (for religious liberty advocates have been raising the issue for years) but of apostates themselves.

The apostates who are courageously stepping out of the shadows and into the open to pursue their right to religious liberty with security, are fighting their own fear in the hope that if their fear can be conquered it will be one less brick in the dam wall.

### **Apostates stand up**

Increasingly, refugees and immigrants from the Muslim world are apostasising in the West. Furthermore, though apostasy may be costly, some European ex-Muslims are summoning the courage to stand up and speak up for their rights.

The German Council of Ex-Muslims was founded in March 2007, the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain was founded in June 2007, and similar organisations also exist in Finland, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

In the Netherlands, the Central Committee for Ex-Muslims was launched on 11 September 2007. The group's founder, Ehsan Jami (22) explained to the media: "Sharia schools say that they will kill the ones who leave Islam. In the West people get threatened, thrown out of their family, beaten up. In Islam you are born Muslim. You do not even choose to be Muslim. We want that to change, so that people are free to choose who they want to be and what they want to believe in."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A New Brand of Nonbelievers: In a Divided Europe, Ex-Muslims Want to Be Heard. 17 Sept 2007 <http://tinyurl.com/5gmuot> – picture: Chairman of the Dutch Ex-Muslim committee Ehsan Jami (22) holds up a red T-shirt that reads "I am an ex-Muslim too". – For full text see print version: <http://tinyurl.com/5z7wq6>; also: Young Muslims begin dangerous fight for the right to abandon faith. 11 Sept 2007 – <http://tinyurl.com/3adrav>

Concerning the 9/11 launch date, Mr. Jami said, “We chose the date because we want to make a clear statement that we no longer tolerate the intolerance of Islam.”

Violence and death threats have forced Mr. Jami into hiding. Between May 2007, when he announced his plans for the Committee, and August 2007, Mr. Jami was violently attacked by Muslim fundamentalists on three separate occasions.

While declaring oneself an "ex-Muslim" in the free West may be dangerous and costly, making that declaration in the Arab Muslim heartland has historically been suicidal. Despite this, on 2 August 2007 Mohammad Hegazi became the first Egyptian born-Muslim to sue Egypt's Interior Ministry for his fundamental human right to leave Islam and follow the religion of his choice (Christianity). That the 'Great Apostasy Debate' should erupt into the open in the Arab world, in the Islamic heartland, is simply phenomenal.<sup>2</sup>

## **Apostaphobia**

In his pre-Islamic days (pre AD 622) Muhammad was a sincere and passionate religious reformer motivated by a deep respect for the local Jews and Christians. In vain he called the polytheistic Arabs to turn from their idolatry and sought recognition as a prophet from the Jews and Christians. The Arabs rejected and persecuted him, and the Jews and Christians rejected and refused to recognise him. But unlike the prophets in whose footsteps he claimed to be following, Muhammad refused to suffer rejection. His response was to compromise his message by absorbing and Islamising pre-Islamic Arabian religion (which made it easier for the Arabs to submit to him) whilst mandating death for polytheism (a threat that made it even easier still!). Then, to ensure that rejection would no longer be an option, he mandated death for blasphemy and apostasy. Islam and the dictators of Islam have been protected by these means for 1400 years.

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<sup>2</sup> Compass Direct <http://tinyurl.com/56pxl5> Egypt: Muslim Sues for Right to Convert to Christianity 7 Aug 2007; Egypt : Convert in Hiding after Lawyer Backs Out 8 Aug 2007; Egypt: Islamists Join Case against Convert to Christianity 10 Oct 2007; Egypt: In Hiding, Convert Continues Fight for Rights 15 Nov 2007, Egypt: Tempers Flare into Melee at Convert's Hearing 25 Jan 2008; Egypt: Court Rules Against Convert 31 Jan 2008, also: Hegazi case: Islam's obsession with conversions, by Samir Khalil Samir sj, 29 Aug 2007 – <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=10161>

Lying at the very heart of the efforts of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) to "combat defamation of religion" (specifically Islam) is not a commitment to truth, tolerance or peace, but the fact that the dictators of Islam are now as ever consumed with and driven by "apostaphobia".<sup>3</sup>

A spiritual battle for the Muslim world has commenced in earnest. As apostasy advances, the apostaphobic dictators of Islam will intensify persecution with the aim of consolidating fear to stem the flow. The battle will be costly and bloody, especially in the Middle East where US influence is waning and Iran is fast becoming the new hegemon.

The Church must give its full and active support to these courageous apostates regardless of the cost. The Western world has for far too long been turning its back on Islam's victims – apostates, women, persecuted minorities (especially dhimmis: Jews and Christians under Islamic subjugation) – choosing instead, short-term political and economic geo-strategic gains to the detriment of justice and long-term security.

Even in the Church, Islam's victims, in particular persecuted and subjugated Christians, are frequently rejected, betrayed and abandoned by Christians pursuing comfortable stress-free, feel-good religion; as well as by those pursuing appeasement or rapprochement with Islam at any cost.

Surely the greatest threat to the nations and churches and individuals who abandon the Lord's children, comes not just from the hostile forces they empower, but from the Father of the suffering Church, the Almighty Lord God himself. For in all their affliction, he too is afflicted (Isaiah 63:9; Matthew 25:45). We cannot reject, betray and abandon the suffering Church and expect God to sympathise with our duplicity.

Understand, O dullest of the people! Fools, when will you be wise? He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see? He who disciplines the nations, does he not rebuke? (Psalm 94:8-10 ESV)

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<sup>3</sup> UN Human Rights Council: Watershed days. – UNHRC to choose between defending human rights and Islamising human rights. WEA RLC News & Analysis by Elizabeth Kendal. 17 Sep 2007 – <http://tinyurl.com/599tuc>

## Postmodernism

Due to globalisation and the revolution in communication and information technologies, it is now easier to spread news, information and the gospel around the world than ever before. One would think it is just a matter of time before light conquers darkness and truth is victorious!

However, as noted earlier, this is a spiritual battle, and so we should not be surprised to find that a spiritual counter-offensive has been launched. Just as an era of irreversible, irresistible openness has come upon the world, the West, including much of the Church, is submitting to the spirit of the age: postmodernism, which specifically targets truth. As the world opens up to truth, the post-modern church abandons it, or at least abandons its claim to it. Not only does postmodernism cripple evangelism, but because post-modern Christians believe truth is relative, they have a really hard time supporting or even caring about Christians who are prepared to suffer and die for it. The devil is such a cunning adversary.

## The New Cold War: Implications for religious liberty

After World War Two, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO, <http://www.nato.int/>) was created to protect Western Europe from Communist imperialism. The socialist states responded by creating their own military treaty: the Warsaw Pact. A Cold War raged between the two nuclear-armed blocs for nearly half a century.

When Communism fell and the Cold War ended (1989-1991) there was great optimism that swords could now be beat into ploughshares (Isaiah 2:4b) – that an age of global peace, harmony and friendship had dawned. Alas, it was not to be, for sin and human weakness still reigned and the Soviet Union's transition was totally bungled by both Russia and America.

The break up of the Soviet Union (1991) and the devastating collapse of the Russian economy left America as the world's only superpower. The Warsaw Pact dissolved, but NATO remained and pursued eastward expansion. And while America ruled the world (so to speak), Russia transitioned from superpower to gangster-capitalist oligarchy to rising siloviki state.

(The *siloviki* are mostly former-KGB and military officers who, as the state and socialist system were collapsing, quietly enriched themselves whilst infiltrating every aspect of society, including the democracy and reform movements, with the aim of eventually restoring themselves to power.)

Upon the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia's borders were rolled back almost overnight to roughly where they were in 1613. Islam quickly exploited this unprecedented opportunity and inserted itself into the newly open, chaotic, impoverished spaces. Islamic missionaries bearing oil money from the Gulf were welcomed, as were trained, battle-hardy *mujahideen* from Afghanistan who adopted the various nationalist struggles (before converting them into Islamic jihads!). Before long, southern Russia, western China and Central Asia were being seriously threatened by imperialistic Islamic revolutionary and terrorist forces.

In response, China, Russia and Central Asia established the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO <http://www.sectsc.org/>), ostensibly for friendship, trade, solidarity and co-operation in security issues, but also and increasingly as a buffer against Western pressure and sanctions.

It is very difficult, especially when you have limited facilities and institutions and all you know is heavy-handedness, to counter Islamic revolutionary and terrorist forces without upsetting Western sensibilities. The task is made all the more difficult because Islamic revolutionary and terrorist forces, being militarily weak, routinely use human shields along with lies and propaganda to manipulate the Western media in order to extract concessions and even co-opt assistance from the West.

(Vietnam's Communists perfected this form of psychological warfare in the early 1970s and shared it with the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organisation). It has since been used to great effect by Islamic groups from Netzarim, Jenin and Beirut in the Middle East; to Gorazde, Srebrenica and Racak in the Balkans, and in May 2005 to Andijan<sup>4</sup> in the Central Asian state of Uzbekistan)

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<sup>4</sup> Uzbekistan: A new wave of serious persecution may be just beginning. WEA RLC News & Analysis by Elizabeth Kendal. 23 March 2007 – <http://tinyurl.com/6q8fkj>

In summary: no sooner had the Cold War ended, than the nations of the world were shuffling into new blocs. We are now headed for a New Cold War, this time with a triangular formation of three blocs: NATO (or US, EU and allies), the SCO and the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Conference, <http://www.oic-oci.org/oicnew/>). This bloc also includes those sub-Saharan African states that, while not OIC members, have sold their independence to Libya's Colonel Muammar Gaddafi).

Despite the competition inside each bloc – America vs Europe (NATO), Russia vs China (SCO), Sunni vs Shi'ite (OIC) – each bloc is committed to consolidating its power and expanding its sphere of influence.

### **Implications for religious liberty**

The OIC and SCO blocs represent not only the world's most repressive regimes but the world's most energy-rich states. As these blocs consolidate, the influence of the US – which leads the world's bloc of liberal democracies – declines. Bolstered by their alliances and their power (wielded increasingly through control of oil and gas), repressive regimes now have little motivation to yield to US pressure to improve religious liberty or increase openness.

Furthermore, as NATO continues its eastward expansion, all the while criticising and shaming the SCO states for their shortcomings with regard to democracy and human rights, the SCO states are increasingly viewing America and NATO (which is normally viewed as a vehicle to advance American hegemony) as competitive and hostile. This not only fuels a vicious cycle of tension and suspicion, but is resulting in an escalation in persecution of Protestants (and Catholics) in SCO states – states which only a decade ago were pursuing reform and seeking American rapprochement.

Meanwhile, Islam is not only consolidating, but lining up behind its new hegemon: Iran. As US influence wanes in the Middle East, the Balkans and in Asia, Muslim leadership will no longer have the motivation to pursue moderation or reform, or to restrain hostile Islamic forces. The degree to which evangelicals in the Middle East and the Balkans have been tolerated and protected for purposes of public relations and propaganda may soon become evident.

One of the greatest tragedies of our times is that after the fall of Communism, the Russian parliament was still dominated by Communist die-hards who were able to pull strings and spoil reforms;

while US policy remained influenced by anti-Russian sentiment and "Russia experts" for whom Communism and Russia were forever synonymous. This ensured that post-Communist Russia continued to be treated as a threat. The opportunity for the rapprochement that could have neutralised Islam was lost.

America vs Russia tensions are particularly problematic in those regions where the interests of the OIC, the SCO and NATO (or US and EU) compete: in particular the "non-aligned" religious fault-line regions of the Balkans and the South Caucasus. NATO got its foothold in the Balkans at the expense of the Serbian Orthodox southern Slavs (natural allies of Russia's Orthodox Slavs) by empowering Iran, Saudi and al-Qaeda backed Islamic terrorist and separatist forces – the mutual enemy of the NATO and SCO states. US competitive zeal for markets and hegemony can sometimes be so intense that it overrides all considerations regarding long-term global security. Likewise, Russia got a foothold in West-leaning Georgia by supporting Muslim ethnic separatism in the autonomous (self-declared independent) province of Abkhazia.

But empowering Islamic and separatist forces in those religious fault-line regions benefits only Islam. It certainly does not bring any benefit to the "pawns" in this New Great Game. Abkhazia, Georgia and Kosovo, Serbia are both occupied (Abkhazia by Russia; Kosovo by NATO/EU), havens for organised crime, threatened by Islamic fundamentalism (Chechen and KLA respectively), and as a consequence are economic no-go zones, dependent on foreign aid and "peacekeeping" forces. Because of this, the largest European IDP (Internally Displaced Person) populations are Serbian and Georgian. (Along with some 508,000 refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, Serbia also has some 246,000 internally-displaced persons (IDPs) from Kosovo; while Georgia has some 243,200 IDPs from Abkhazia). (UNHCR and ECRE)

Eventually the citizens of these "liberated" yet unviable micro-states (Abkhazia and Kosovo – for starters) will end up with less rights and prospects than they ever had as Muslim ethnic minorities in secular states. This idiocy is all driven by New Cold War politics, and Islam and ethnic separatism are the only real winners. (Rather than waging jihads, today's militarily weak Islam is spreading and consolidating by means of predatory migrations followed by Muslim

ethnic separatism and irredentism. They woo the West with propaganda and talk of rights, liberty and democracy. They are having great success.)

Meanwhile, the OIC bloc has managed to get its resolution "Combating Defamation of Religions" passed in the UN General Assembly by a recorded vote of 108 in favour to 51 against, with 25 abstentions. This was of course thanks to the support of the anti-American SCO bloc which is made up of states that, considering the Islamic terror that snaps at their heels, should know better.<sup>5</sup>

As the three blocs consolidate, the only way to tackle the threat of Islamic imperialism will be for the NATO and SCO blocs to stop competing and start co-operating: militarily, politically and economically, for the sake of our mutual interest – long-term global security.

### **A word on the Middle East**

On 29 January 2008, Stratfor Intelligence (Geopolitical Diary) stated: "Al Qaeda, the reason for being involved in the region [the Middle East] in the first place, is essentially dead. The various Sunni Arab powers that made al Qaeda possible have lined up behind Washington. Iran and the United States may still wish to quibble over details, but the strategic picture is clearing: a US-led coalition is going to shape the Middle East, and it is up to Iran whether it wants to play the role of that coalition's spear or its target."

This is one occasion where I find myself in strong disagreement with Stratfor. First, I do not believe that al Qaeda is "dead". Secondly, I do not accept that the Sunni Arab powers are "lined up behind Washington". Just because Arab sheiks and princes shake hands with President Bush and buy American weapons doesn't necessarily mean they are "lined up behind Washington". For while Washington has been courting the Sunni Arabs, the Sunni Arabs have been courting Iran.

On 3-4 December 2007, the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became the first foreign leader to attend the summit of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) in Doha, Qatar (a US ally). Arab journalist Omran Salman comments on the significance of this event by noting that the GCC (which comprises Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) was

<sup>5</sup> UN General Assembly adopts resolution against defamation of religions 20 December 2007 – <http://tinyurl.com/2vl84y>



"founded in 1981 with the fundamental goal of standing up to the danger presented by Iran to the states of the region ..."<sup>6</sup>

Salman also notes that in December 2007, "Saudi King 'Abdallah bin 'Abd Al-'Aziz ... hastened to send an official invitation to Ahmadinejad to perform the hajj and thus become the first Iranian president to perform the hajj while still in office ... It doesn't take much to see," says Salman, "that all this is a result of the uneasiness felt by the Gulf regimes friendly to the US at Iran's increasing power and the US's retreating power."<sup>7</sup>

Salman also comments on US powerlessness vis-à-vis Syrian belligerence in Lebanon, and on the restoration of relations between Egypt (another US ally) and Iran, a relationship that was severed in 1979 on account of Egypt's commitment to peace with Israel, Egypt's apprehension over Iran's Shi'ite Islamic Revolution, and Egypt's distrust of Iran's regional intentions. Today however, the first high level talks in 30 years are under way and the full restoration of diplomatic ties may be imminent.<sup>8</sup>

Most significantly, Salman reports that while Ali Larijani, the representative of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, was in Egypt in December he met with various Arab leaders including Arab League Secretary-General 'Amr Moussa, who "urged the Arabs to begin consulting and co-operating with Iran, emphasising that expanding the relations between the two sides is something that is 'necessary and efficacious'. Likewise, Moussa spoke strongly about the importance of Arab-Iranian co-operation in order to deal with the sensitive situation in the region ..." (see footnote 7).

I personally agree with Omar Salman's assessment that an era of Iranian hegemony in the Middle East is upon us. As was explained and forecast in the WEA RLC Trends 2006-2007 posting entitled "Shi'ite

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<sup>6</sup> Editor of Liberal Arab Website Aafaq: The Era of Iranian Hegemony in the Middle East Is Upon Us. 21 January 2008. Special Dispatch Series - No. 1817 – <http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP181708>

<sup>7</sup> Further reporting, see : Ahmadinejad invited to be pilgrim. 13 Dec 2007 – <http://tinyurl.com/6eyerw>; also: Abdullah, Ahmadinejad Hold Wide-Ranging Talks. 21 Dec 2007 – <http://tinyurl.com/64ag51>

<sup>8</sup> Further reporting see: Iran and Egypt 'to restore ties'. BBC, 28 Jan 2008 – <http://tinyurl.com/5kdf36>; also: Iranian rapprochement. Al-Ahram, 31 January - 6 February 2008, Issue No. 882 – <http://tinyurl.com/5glesa>

Ascendancy"<sup>9</sup>, the Shi'ites are seducing the Sunnis and uniting the sects through violence against Israel. They started this process in 2006, using Hezbollah (Shi'ite proxy of Iran) in Lebanon and Hamas (Sunni, but sponsored by Iran) in Gaza. While this is obviously bad news for Israel, it is also bad news for the Christians of the Middle East, because eventually this violence will target them as well, especially as US influence wanes – or departs. For as the old Muslim war-cry goes: "Baad a- Sabt biji Yom al-Ahad" (After Saturday comes Sunday, meaning after we deal with the Jews we'll deal with the Christians).

While Sunnis and Shi'ites are traditionally enemies, we must never underestimate the ability of Sunni and Shi'ite fundamentalists to unite for the purpose of advancing Islam; they have done so in Chechnya against the Russians and in Bosnia and Kosovo against the Serbs; they are doing so in the Middle East against Israel and will do so against Middle Eastern Christians when "Sunday" comes.

Yes, the Sunni Arab states are lining up, but it is behind apocalyptic Iran. According to terrorism analyst Yossef Bodansky (Defense & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy 1, 2008), the US President has lined up behind Iran too, in order to cut a deal whereby the US will not challenge Iranian hegemony in Iraq and the wider region, in exchange for Iran's guarantee that the US can have a honourable exit from Iraq (one resembling "achievement").

Since the reported November 2007 deal, the violence in Iraq has diminished, Iran's nuclear program has been deemed non-threatening, the Sunni Arabs have raced to line up behind Iran, and Ahmadinejad has purged his cabinet.<sup>10</sup>

With the Muslim bloc consolidating behind Iran it is difficult to see how Mohammed Hegazi (an Egyptian apostate) can secure religious liberty for Egypt. His courageous stand will, however, raise awareness of freedom and justice issues, further expose Islamic repression and violence, and doubtless will be used by God to generate many more apostates who will be in great need of prayer and refuge.

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<sup>9</sup> RL Trend: Shiite Ascendancy. WEA RLC News & Analysis by Elizabeth Kendal. 5 Feb 2007 – <http://tinyurl.com/6d8uar>

<sup>10</sup> Further reporting, see: Bush embarks on Saudi-brokered deal with Tehran. 28 Jan 2008. <http://www.debka.com/article.php?aid=1321>

## A closing word

As noted earlier, when the Cold War ended (1989-1991) ended there was great optimism that swords could now be beat into ploughshares (Isaiah 2:4b) and that an age of global peace, harmony and friendship may have dawned.

It is interesting to note, however, that in the Isaiah passage (Isaiah 2:1-5) the changed social order is not the means to a changed spiritual order; rather the changed social order is the result of a changed spiritual order.

We are entering dark days where war and persecution of the Church are set to escalate markedly. But regardless of what is happening in this world, God is still sovereign, his promises still stand, the Church is still his instrument and prayer and mission-preaching-witness are still his appointed means.

Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts (Zechariah 4:6 ESV).

## Guidelines on reporting for publicity and advocacy

The Christian leaders gathered in the Issue Group ‘The persecuted church’ at the 2004 Forum held in Pattaya, Thailand found the following guidelines, initially developed by a Christian advocacy agency, helpful for those who are reporting on persecution. We have revised the document and added check lists. The IJRF wishes to contribute towards developing *best practice* among advocacy agencies for religious freedom and human rights. Please let us have other documents of similar nature.

The original source is: David Claydon (ed.). A new vision, a new heart, a renewed call. Lausanne Occasional Papers from the 2004 Forum for World Evangelization hosted by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization in Pattaya, Thailand. Pasadena: William Carey Library 2005, Vol 1, p.194-198. - All Lausanne occasional papers can be downloaded from [www.lausanne.org](http://www.lausanne.org). [CS]

**Keywords** Best practice, information, advocacy, prayer

These guidelines relate to information gathering and dissemination of information for advocacy or publicity purposes.

### Guiding principle

**Challenge:** Anyone who is involved with the persecuted Church can cite stories that falls short under any of the following categories: partly inaccurate, mostly inaccurate or completely inaccurate.

**Causes:** The cause can be the information gathering process: the sources prove to have been unreliable. The cause might also lie in the information dissemination process: media or advocacy organizations might misquote, take information out of context in a way which changes the meaning of the quote, or inflate numbers, etc.

**Principle:** Whether we are involved in the information gathering process or in the information disseminating process it is imperative that we make every effort to ensure the information does not contain any inaccuracy.

**Rationale:** This is important for two reasons, first of all the biblical imperative: The Bible commands us not to ‘give false testimony’ (Exodus 20:16) but to rejoice with the truth (1 Corinthians 13:6). Secondly there is an eminently practical imperative: Inaccuracies will have a negative impact for the victims of persecution, the information

source and the disseminator of information. Concerning the victims of persecution, people will become reluctant to help because they do not know what to believe any more. The source of the inaccurate information will be labelled as an unreliable source. The disseminators of the information (media or advocacy group) will lose their credibility which will impair the assistance they can give in current and future cases.

## **Guidelines for information gathering**

Every effort must be made to make sure the information is:

- accurate (verified),
- timely (prompt and updated),
- usable (the type of information needed).

### **Accuracy**

We have to make sure that every aspect of the information that we gather is accurate. That includes information about the victim(s), the perpetrators and the act(s) of persecution. Some guidelines that could increase the accuracy of information:

- Assess the reliability of your sources of information: are they known to you, what is their track record, would they benefit in any way from giving inflated or incorrect information, etc?
- Get as much information as possible from personal sources. Possible sources are: victim(s), eye witnesses, relatives and friends, media or human rights activists and religious or community leaders. Where possible also try to get information from the perpetrator(s).
- As much as possible cross-check every piece of information you have gathered with documentary evidence (court papers, police statements, medical statements, etc.)
- Assess the information and establish if certain evidence is missing (see also below on "3. Usability")
- Compare the alleged violation with similar cases to see if it is part of a pattern.

## Timeliness

Usually it is not possible to obtain all the data mentioned above in a short time. It is important though to communicate the minimum of information as soon as possible. If advocacy is requested, the minimum required information is:

- the full name of the victim (if possible also the ID or passport number)
- the real reason for the persecution and why that is assumed to be the real reason (this is important because governments often claim people are arrested for committing a crime)

It is important to communicate more or new information as it becomes available. Also changes in the situation should be communicated as soon as possible.

## Usability

Information should try to answer the following basic question: **Who** did **what** to **whom**, **when**, **where** and **why**? See check lists below. Include any other information that you believe may be relevant. If publicity is requested, it is very useful to include a photograph of the victim.

### Check-list 1: Accuracy

#	Question	Comment	Ok
<b>1.1</b>	<b>Reliability of information source</b>		
1.2	known		
1.3	track record		
1.4	bias		
1.5	other		
<b>1.6</b>	<b>Personal sources exhausted?</b>		
1.7	victim(s)		
1.8	eye witnesses		
1.9	relatives		
1.10	friends		
1.11	media		
1.12	human rights activists		
1.13	religious leaders		
1.14	community leaders		
1.15	perpetrators		
1.15	other		
<b>1.17</b>	<b>Documentary evidence used for cross checking?</b>		
1.18	court papers		
1.19	police statements		
1.20	medical statements		
1.21	other		
<b>1.22</b>	<b>Assessment of information done?</b>		
1.23	evidence missing?	(See check-lists 2, 3, 4 on usability)	
<b>1.24</b>	<b>Pattern when compared to similar cases?</b>		

### Check-list 2: Biographical data

#	Item		OK
2.1	Full name (as specified on identity card or passport)		
2.2	Number of passport or identity card		
2.3	Assumed or adopted name		
2.4	Profession		
2.5	Date of birth or approximate age		
2.6	Sex		
2.7	Nationality/ethnic group		
2.8	Religion on identity card		
2.9	Address		
2.10	Family details	marital status	
		number of dependants	
2.11	Names and ages of dependants		
2.12	1.	6.	
2.13	2.	7.	
2.14	3.	8.	
2.15	4.	9.	
2.16	5.	10.	
2.17	Details of church membership		
2.18	Name of church		
2.19	Denomination (or house church)		
2.20	Date of baptism (if a convert)		



### Check-list 3: Information on persecution

#	Question	OK
3.1	Describe in chronological order <b>what happened</b> . Include time, date, location and agencies, groups and individuals involved.	
3.2	Explain the <b>current situation</b> .	
3.3	Does the victim have a <b>history of persecution</b> ? (If so, please elaborate.)	
<b>3.4</b>	<b>Reason for persecution</b>	
3.5	Real reason	
3.6	Reason that is officially given, including relevant legislation that is applied	

### Check-list 4: Information in case of imprisonment

#	Question	Comment	OK
4.1	Place of arrest		
4.2	Forces who carried out the arrest or are believed to have carried it out		
4.3	Did they show a warrant or decision by a public authority? (If so who issued the warrant or decision?)		
4.4	Any detail of abuse, ill-treatment or illegality in the course of the arrest		
4.5	Is the victim formally charged? If so what are these charges? (Include relevant legislation)		
4.6	Place of detention		
4.7	Forces holding the victim in custody		
4.8	Is the prisoner allowed visitors, especially family and lawyer (and, in the case of an expatriate, consular officers)?		
4.9	Does the victim have a lawyer (contact details)? If so, who chose the lawyer?		
4.10	Under what conditions is the victim held?		
4.11	What is the victim's state of health?		
4.12	Has the victim been subjected to torture or ill-treatment (either physical or psychological) since arrest?		
4.13	Has the victim been tried? If so, give details including date and place of trial(s), kind of court, court rulings.		
4.14	If not, is a trial scheduled?		

## Guidelines for information dissemination

Before disseminating any information of events of persecution we need to ensure:

- Authorization
- Confidentiality
- Accuracy
- Information management (circulation codes)

### Authorization

Before any action on behalf of the victim(s) of persecution can be taken we need to have authorization. We need to know what the relevant parties want us to do on behalf of the victim(s).

There are often three parties involved: the victim him/herself, the immediate family (if they have a favourable attitude towards the victim) and the Christian leadership they relate to (church leader or main discipler). Each might have a different perspective on the situation and consideration should be given to the genuine concerns of each party.

### Confidentiality

We need to ensure that we provide the protection of our source(s) of information that they require. Confidentiality is important because it 1) protects the source(s) from harm, 2) strengthens a relationship of trust with the source and 3) ensures a continued flow of information from that source.

- We can never use somebody's name or information they have shared with us without their prior approval.
- If people require confidentiality we should be very careful that pieces of information cannot be traced back to persons by logical deduction and elimination.
- Consider the use of initials or pseudonyms, geographical areas (e.g. province instead of a city), etc.

### Accuracy (See accuracy check list above.)

Also, where possible we should give our sources the opportunity to review the information before it is disseminated so they can correct mistakes or misunderstandings.

## Information management

In times of crisis, information falling into the wrong hands can often lead to serious consequences. Many problems have been caused by information that was disseminated for prayer or advocacy purposes that ended up in the media. The media is a powerful tool, but also a dangerous one.

Although complete control over information is very difficult, the use of circulation codes can be helpful. Also your mailing list for each circulation code should be limited to people who understand the limitations and have agreed to abide by them.

### Possible Circulation Codes

For prayer requests	
<b>1. Confidential</b>	Limited to internal circulation. Do not circulate this outside your organization. May not be cited or quoted.
<b>2. Restricted</b>	For internal circulation within your organization and with trusted groups or individuals known to you. This circulation code <b>MUST</b> be included. Not for release to the press.
<b>3. Public</b>	May be circulated to general mailing lists, outside organizations, the media and quoted from freely in reports.
For advocacy requests	
<b>Request for discreet advocacy</b>	May be circulated to selected politicians or human rights organizations. This circulation code <i>must</i> be included. Not for release to the press or for public letter-writing campaigns.
<b>Request for public advocacy</b>	May be circulated to any politicians or human rights organizations. Can be used for public letter-writing or media campaigns.

**Check-list5: Information dissemination**

#	Question	Comment	Ok
<b>5.1</b>	<b>Authorization</b>		
5.2	victim		
5.3	immediate family		
5.4	Christian leadership		
5.5	balancing of concerns		
<b>5.6</b>	<b>Confidentiality</b>		
5.7	confidentiality required?		
5.8	approval for use of names/ information		
5.9	back tracing avoided		
5.10	anonymisation		
5.11	generalisation of localities		
5.12	other		
<b>5.13</b>	<b>Accuracy</b>		
5.14	accuracy check completed		
5.15	reviewed by sources		
5.16	corrections implemented		
<b>5.17</b>	<b>Information management</b>		
5.18	Prayer Request Code assigned	<input type="checkbox"/> confidential <input type="checkbox"/> restricted <input type="checkbox"/> public	
5.19	Advocacy Code assigned	<input type="checkbox"/> discreet <input type="checkbox"/> public	

**Check list 6: Quality control**

#	Question	Who	When	Ok
6.1	accuracy checked			
6.2	usability checked			
6.3	biographical information sufficient			
6.4	persecution description sufficient			
6.5	imprisonment information sufficient			
6.6	still up to date?			
6.7	authorizations obtained			
6.8	confidentiality established			
6.9	circulation codes assigned			
6.10	proof read			
6.11	photograph of victim			
6.12	additional items			
6.13	dissemination authorized			

## Noteworthy

The Noteworthy section points to findings and reports published elsewhere. The editors invite all researchers and organizations to proactively keep us up to date about their latest output. We currently include what we came across in our research but we would like this section turn into a vibrant market place of information sharing. Please indicate whether material you submit is for publication or for background information of the editors only.

After the Personalia item, all entries are sorted alphabetically according to the name of the originating organization. With few exceptions the materials were published in 2008. Unless otherwise stated they are available online. [CS]

### Personalia

**James D. Standish** has been appointed new Executive Director of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent, federal agency advising the Administration and Congress. Prior to that he has served as Director of Legislative Affairs at the Seventh-day Adventist Church World Headquarters for seven years representing fifteen million church members on Capitol Hill.

Mr. Standish is widely published, has discussed religious freedom issues on nationally broadcast television and radio, and has testified on religious freedom matters before the United States House of Representatives. He received his undergraduate degree from Newbold College in England, a M.B.A. from the University of Virginia and a J.D., cum laude, from Georgetown University. He is a member of the Bar of Virginia State and the District of Columbia, and has been admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court and the Fourth Circuit.

The Commission, established by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA), monitors violations of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in IRFA and set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments. It provides independent policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress, and is the first government commission in the world with the sole mission of reviewing and making policy recommendations on the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom globally.

## Barnabas Fund

[info@barnabasfund.org](mailto:info@barnabasfund.org), [www.barnabasfund.org](http://www.barnabasfund.org)

“Barnabas Fund was established in 1993 with the aim of providing practical help to Christians in Muslim environments. Since that time our ministry has grown and we now bring hope and aid to the persecuted Church in over 50 countries. [...]”

### *The Other Nine Campaign*

1 out of 10 Christians live with persecution. Well prepared popular material available for download, some of which is listed below. - [www.barnabasfund.org/theothernine/downloads.php](http://www.barnabasfund.org/theothernine/downloads.php)

### **What persecution really means...(6p)** <http://tinyurl.com/5v9k2r>

- You live in daily fear of violence, kidnap, rape or even death
- Talking to a non-Christian friend about Jesus could land you in jail.
- You carry a social stigma, affecting the jobs you can get, or how your children are treated in school.
- You live in utter poverty, trapped by a system which limits your opportunities to break free.
- The police are not interested in helping you if you are attacked, and may even arrest you although you were the victim.

### **Types of persecution (5p)** <http://tinyurl.com/57hemt>

### **Poverty and persecution (5p)** <http://tinyurl.com/6z7vyv>

### **Christians in Burma (Myanmar) (15p)**

By Patrick Sookhdeo 2007 <http://tinyurl.com/6xpm63>

## Council on Faith and International Affairs (CFIA)

[info@cfia.org](mailto:info@cfia.org), [www.cfia.org](http://www.cfia.org)

CFIA is a research and education division of the Institute for Global Engagement (IGE): “The Council equips members of the international affairs community with a balanced understanding of the role of religion in public life worldwide. It fosters a pluralistic forum where people of different faiths and worldviews can constructively discuss religion's impact on the world today. This approach provides rigorous analysis and thoughtful commentary to scholars, policy makers, and practitioners.”



### **The Review of Faith and International Affairs**

“CFIA launched *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* in the spring of 2003. Now published quarterly, it is the only journal focusing on the premier issue of our times—the relation of religion to international relations. It is not a peer reviewed journal of academic specialization. Rather it is a journal of rigorous analysis, timely reportage, and thoughtful commentary for both professionals and educated general audiences.”

Some articles are freely available online.

- September 2008 issue: “Faith & Foreign Policy: Recommendations for the Next President.”
- June 2008 issue: “Religious Freedom and U.S. Foreign Policy: Taking Stock, Looking Forward.”
  - Religious Freedom: Good for What Ails Us? Brian J. Grim
  - Methodology, Metrics, and Moral Imperatives in Religious Freedom Diplomacy. By Robert A. Seiple, Summer 2008.

### **China Aid Association** *info@ChinaAid.org, www.ChinaAid.org*

**Annual Report** of Persecution by the Government on Christian House Churches within Mainland China, January 2007 - December 2007, China Aid Association USA, February 2008, 26 p.

Every year, China Aid publishes a Persecution Report with statistics on persecution in China, sorted by province.

### **Chinese Law and Religion Monitor Journal**

*www.monitorchina.org*

“Since 2004, in partnership with the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), China Aid publishes the biannual Chinese Law and Religion Monitor Journal, the only journal of its kind in this field. Two thousand copies of each volume are published and disseminated to human rights and religious freedom-related individuals, institutions and organizations, key U.S. government leaders and the United Nations Council on Human Rights. Each edition contains the most current research and analysis of religion and the law. Its purpose is to provide Chinese scholars and researchers, policy makers, lawyers, judges and human-rights advocates with the best available information on the current challenges in the struggle for religious freedom in China, particularly in the area of legislation and rule-making.”

## Christian Solidarity Worldwide

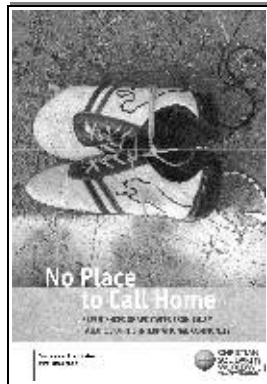
*admin@csw.org.uk, www.csw.org.uk*

Material on the following countries: Columbia, Cuba, Peru; Belarus, Bulgaria, Turkey; Algeria, Egypt, Iran; Eritrea, Nigeria, Sudan; India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka. Press releases dating back to 1998, more extensive reports/briefings dating back to 2002, depending on country. In 2008 15 *Briefings* or longer documents have been published to date, which are briefly presented below with the most outstanding/ recent first.

### **Maral, Ziya 2008. No place to call home:**

Experiences of Apostates from Islam. Failures of the International Community. New Malden, Surrey: CSW, 116 p, 29 April 2008.

Apostasy is the renunciation of religious faith, and apostasy from Islam in particular has always been a contentious issue. Although the Qur'an does not prescribe a temporal punishment for apostasy, the vast majority of traditional Islamic theology and jurisprudence has advocated the death penalty for a mentally sane male apostate and life-long imprisonment or harsh treatment for a female apostate. [The implementation thereof is varied in today's Muslim nations ...].



Apostates are subject to gross and wide-ranging human rights abuses including extra judicial killings by state-related agents or mobs; honour killings by family members; detention, imprisonment, torture, physical and psychological intimidation by security forces; the denial of access to judicial services and social services; the denial of equal employment or education opportunities; social pressure resulting in loss of housing and employment; and day-to-day discrimination and ostracism in education, finance and social activities. The affect of all this on the personal lives of apostates and their families can be significant and far-reaching. As the number of apostate communities has significantly increased in the Middle East, North Africa and Asia over the past twenty years, human rights abuses have been more regularly reported.

[...] these nations and the international community have failed in their duty to uphold the rights of apostates by neglecting to guarantee their personal safety and their full and fair participation in society. This report calls on Muslim nations, the international community, the UN and the international media to resolutely address the serious violations of human rights suffered by apostates.

### **Algeria**

Increasing persecution of Christians in Algeria and the application of legislation defining ‘conditions and rules for the exercise of religious worship other than Islam’. CSW Briefing, 7 p, 01 March 2008.

During 2006 and 2007, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) raised concerns over a new Algerian law entitled “The conditions and rules for the exercise of religious worship other than Islam”. This law was adopted in September 2006. In May 2007, two Presidential decrees were issued which established the government committees required to enforce the law. The new law effectively criminalizes the basic, internationally recognised rights of freedom of assembly, association, and the freedom to manifest a religion. It also has negative implications for the right of religious minorities engaged in propagating their faith amongst Muslims.

[..] The new law has opened the way for Christian leaders to be accused of proselytism and blasphemy, and they have been threatened with imprisonment and monetary fines. It has also led to the closure of ten churches by local authorities.

### **Iran - Religious freedom profile**

CSW Briefing, 12 p, 01 July 2008.

Since the 1979 revolution, Iran’s religious and ethnic minorities have suffered gross human rights violations, including extra-judicial and judicial killings, incommunicado detentions, confiscation of property, denial of education and inequality in legal matters. Though the intensity of the persecution of minorities decreased during the initial years of reformist President Khatami’s government, the last years of his administration and the new government of President Ahmadinejad has seen a renewed deterioration in human rights. This has been a cause of great concern for religious and ethnic minorities in Iran. During the last two years, there have been fresh waves of arrests, detention and intimidation of Muslim converts to Christianity and Bahá’ís.

**Egypt - Religious freedom profile**

CSW Briefing, 16 p, 1 July 2008.

Egypt is a dynamic and influential country in the Middle-East and North African (MENA). As international attention on Egypt focuses predominantly on the tensions between secular, modernising rule and the growing political power of the Muslim Brotherhood, a worrying trend of human rights violations and sectarian clashes continue largely unnoticed. Although Egypt is party to many international human rights treaties, non-Muslims in particular have faced increasing abuse between 2006 and 2008 from the state security apparatus and political institutions, as well as attacks by mobs.

**China**

Persecution of Protestant Christians in the approach to the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games. CSW Briefing, produced in cooperation with China Aid, 12 p, 1 June 2008.

The approach of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games has been accompanied by a significant deterioration in religious freedom for China's unregistered Protestant Church, also known as the house church. China continues to seriously restrict religious freedom, requiring religious activity to take place within the confines of the restrictive state-controlled bodies. Those practising their faith outside these bodies risk sanction, with penalties including discrimination, fines, confiscation and destruction of property, arrest, humiliating treatment, torture, imprisonment and forced labour. Alongside these punishments, meetings are raided, Bibles and religious materials are confiscated and churches are destroyed.

**Turkey – Religious freedom profile**

CSW Briefing, 15 p, 1 May 2008.

Freedom of religion and belief, including the freedom to manifest and to proselytise a religion or belief, are protected in Turkey by the Turkish Constitution and Turkish Criminal Law. These freedoms are further protected by binding international human rights treaties to which Turkey is a party. This includes the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923, the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights. However, this promising legal position is overshadowed by a long history of human rights abuses in Turkey, which has resulted in social and political pressure on

today's minority ethnic and religious communities, and has also contributed to the decline of these populations.

European Union (EU) negotiation talks and accession requirements have resulted in some welcome new legislation pertaining to freedom of religion and belief in Turkey. However, the implementation of this legislation is often fraught with difficulties, and religious persecution continues as a result of direct or indirect involvement of the state structures. During 2007 and 2008, an increasing number of mob attacks against Christians were reported.

### **Cuba**

Religious liberty in Cuba. CSW Briefing, 12 p, 1 April 2008.

Despite Cuba's recent accession to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights the government has yet to make any significant improvements in the area of religious liberty. Instead, over the past two years there has been an increase in reported violations of religious freedom, including harassment of church leaders and the forced closure, confiscation or destruction of church buildings. Church leaders who have openly called on the government to respect religious freedom and those who have refused to work on behalf of the government (as informers or by lending public support to government initiatives) have been targeted for particularly severe harassment.

### **Cuba**

Religious freedom violations in Cuban prisons. CSW Briefing, 6 p, 1 March 2008.

The Cuban government systematically violates the religious rights of political prisoners, in contravention of the UN Standard Minimum Rules on the Treatment of Prisoners, by arbitrarily denying them access to clergy, confiscating bibles and other religious literature and materials (including rosaries), and prohibiting them from attending religious services. These violations are reported repeatedly and consistently as occurring in high security prisons across the country indicating that they are not simply a result of decisions made by local prison authorities, but rather state policy instigated at the highest levels. [...] suggests that these policies are specifically directed at Christian political prisoners, particularly those whose faith has played a significant role in their human rights and/or pro-democracy activity,

and are likely part of a general policy of applying pressure on all political prisoners in an effort to punish them and to break them down psychologically.

### **India**

Religious violence and discrimination against Christians in 2007. CSW Briefing, 55 p, 1 March 2008.

Despite the existence of strong constitutional and legislative protections for freedom of religion and belief in India, 2007 saw a continued pattern of societal opposition to the religious activities of minorities (particularly including Christians), which often erupted into violent attacks. There continued to be a chronic problem of impunity for perpetrators of religiously-motivated violence. These issues are compounded by specific legislative obstructions to religious freedom, in the form of state-level Freedom of Religion Acts (known dysphemistically as ‘anti-conversion laws’) and the religious conditionality attached to the definition of the Scheduled Castes, which governs eligibility for the ‘reservation’ system of quotas in the public sector. A consistent pattern of religiously-motivated violence against Christians was recorded throughout 2007 [...]

### **Burma**

CSW visit to the Thailand-Burma border and Malaysia. CSW Briefing 24 p, 25 February 2008.

Burma continues to deteriorate into further political, human rights and humanitarian crises. The assassination of the General Secretary of the Karen National Union (KNU), Padoh Mahn Sha Lah Phan, on 14 February 2008, is a major setback for the Karen people and for the entire movement for democracy in Burma. In addition, the announcement by Burma’s military regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), of plans to hold a referendum on the new Constitution in May 2008 and elections in 2010, is a blatant attempt to rubber-stamp military rule and ignore the repeatedly expressed will of the people of Burma, the United Nations, and the international community. The regime’s so-called “roadmap to democracy” blatantly excludes the genuine representatives of the Burmese people [...]. Furthermore, the dire humanitarian crisis facing the internally displaced people (IDPs) in eastern Burma continues unabated.

## **Vietnam**

Analysis: 2007 Revision of Internal Training Manual ‘Concerning the Task of the Protestant Religion in the Northern Mountainous Region’ CSW Briefing, 10 p, 1 February 2008.

In 2006, an internal religious affairs training manual covering the northern highland provinces was leaked from the government Committee on Religious Affairs (CRA). This document implicated the government in a plan to ‘resolutely subdue the abnormally rapid and spontaneous development of the Protestant religion in the region’ (p. 44). After widespread international criticism, the government undertook to revise the manual, and a new edition was provided to foreign diplomatic officials in 2007. Although the revised version involves a lessening of the inflammatory language which was more characteristic of the 2006 manual, there is no change to its core objective to ‘solve the Protestant problem’ by subduing its development. [...] This indicates a severe deficiency in the normalisation process of Protestant congregations in the northern highlands, and brings into question the efficacy of Vietnam’s current policy framework for religious activities.

## **Democratic Republic of Congo**

Urgent human rights cases in government-controlled areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), 6 p, 16 January 2008.

The international community is currently expending billions of dollars in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with the ultimate goal of ensuring the development of stability, an end to impunity and the establishment of the rule of law. To this end, it has assembled the largest mission in the history of the United Nations (UN), which is mandated to both keep peace and to enforce it wherever and whenever such action is deemed necessary. [...] Unfortunately, events in government-controlled areas increasingly provide worrying indications that the government of Joseph Kabila is not altogether willing to commit to these principles. Instead, while the Congolese government benefits from an unusual degree of international support, the harassment of members of civil society, journalists and political opponents, the manipulation of the judicial system, and extra-judicial execution regularly occur in the areas under its control.

**India**

Preliminary Report: Communal violence in Kandhamal District, Orissa. CSW Briefing 12 p, 01 January 2008.

During the week following 24 December 2007, the Kandhamal district of Orissa state was the scene of widespread violence, targeted primarily at Christians in Dalit and tribal communities. The All India Christian Council (AICC) estimated the damage at 95 churches or Christian institutions and 730 properties damaged or destroyed alongside an unknown number of deaths, and judged this to constitute 'the largest attack on the Christian community in the history of democratic India'. [...] The roots of the violence lay predominantly in a lengthy process of incitement of anti-Christian feeling by Hindutva organisations, particularly the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) [...].

**Belarus**

Religious freedom violations, 22 p, 1 January 2008.

In recent years, respect for human rights and civil liberties, including freedom of speech, assembly, association, religion, worship and expression, have continued to deteriorate in Belarus. International standards of human rights are not upheld by the government. Instead, the government itself repeatedly violates the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to which it is a party. Religious freedom is restricted both directly and indirectly by the authorities. Nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), religious institutions and religious leaders are subjected to frequent harassment, prosecution, fines, repression and even imprisonment under the terms of the 2002 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations. Over the past eighteen months, two pastors and one human rights defender were arrested for so-called unregistered activities, a practice not heard of since the fall of the Soviet Union.

**Columbia**

A prophetic call, report no.2: Columbian Protestant churches document their suffering and their hope. Case Registry: July to December 2006. A publication of the Christian Center for Justice, Peace and Non Violent Action (JUSTAPAZ) and the Commission for Restoration, Life and Peace of the Evangelical Council of Columbia, CEDECOL. Bogotá, August 2007, 100 p, Supported by Christian Solidarity and others.



Justapaz and the Commission for Restoration, Life and Peace of CEDECOL last jointly reported on the violence related to the armed conflict as it affects churches in August 2006 in the first edition of *A Prophetic Call: Colombian Protestant Churches Document Their Suffering and Their Hope*. This second edition of the joint grass-roots documentation report provides findings from all of 2006. [...] Also during 2006, 68 cases of human rights violations against people associated with the churches occurred, with 223 victims and 289 individual acts of aggression. Death threats were the most frequent form of violence (147 victims). Other violations included forced displacement, forced disappearances, torture, arbitrary arrests, attacks, and the use of civilian populations as human shields by armed actors.

### **Evangelical Fellowship of Canada**

**Broken Promises:** The Protestant experience with religious freedom in China in advance of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. June 2008, 26 p.  
*www.evangelicalfellowship.ca*

### **Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l**

*info@hrwf.net, www.hrwf.org*

“In 1989, a number of human rights defenders founded an NGO called Bruxelles-Droits de l’Homme/ Brussels- Human Rights/ Brüssel Menschenrechte”, later re-named to Droits de l’homme sans frontières. The organization has gradually expanded into Human Rights Without Frontiers International (2001) to embrace its branch offices in Belgium, China, USA, and Nepal as well as its associate members in Armenia (Pro-Democracy Association), Bulgaria (Tolerance Foundation), Georgia (Human Rights Information and Documentation Centre), Iraq (Assyrian Aid Society), and Japan (Life Funds for North Korean Refugees), Russia, and South Korea. Since 1997, the Belgian branch of HRWF Int. has been an associate member of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights.

From its inception, the main focus of our activities has been monitoring, research, and analysis in the field of human rights as well as promotion of democracy and the rule of law on national and international level. In these endeavours, we have been guided by the understanding that it is not sufficient for international norms and standards in the field of human rights to be approved and adopted by

governments. States enjoy different levels of approximation to democratic development and the rule of law and human rights norms do not always have a “taken-for-granted” quality. In many cases, they still need to undergo a long, and sometimes painful, process of socialization in order to become integrated into state policies. The success of this process would be predicated, among other things, on the strength of non-governmental human rights networks to instigate changes towards human rights promotion.”

**Country projects:** Belgium, Bhutan, China, East Timor, Iraq, Macedonia (FYROM), Nepal, North Korea, Turkey

Freedom of Religion and Belief → News 2008 (catalogued by country going back to 1999)

Sample documents:

- Human rights reports on Turkey. 2007, 4 p. – A list of links
- Human rights violations in non-EU countries: Directions for use of the European Parliament mechanisms by human rights defenders by Willy Fautré, 7 p.
- Handbook of Advocacy for Indigenous Peoples. By Shamiran Mako, 2004, 27 p.

## International Christian Network

*[http://www.institut-diakrisis.de/downloads\\_en.html](http://www.institut-diakrisis.de/downloads_en.html)*

### **Blankenburg Appeal & Pastoral Directive: Readiness to suffer for Christ**

It is noteworthy how some Christians in Europe are rediscovering the privilege of suffering for Christ and do so in an ecumenical spirit, discovering that suffering can unite across confessional boundaries. The Blankenburg Appeal is the message of a conference in short form. The full declaration is entitled „Readiness to Suffer for Christ: A Pastoral Directive from the Second Ecumenical Congress of the International Christian Network in Bad Blankenburg, Germany, 15 – 18 October 2006“ [www.institut-diakrisis.de/PDEnglishVersion.pdf](http://www.institut-diakrisis.de/PDEnglishVersion.pdf). A documentary volume with some of the conference papers has been published in German: Peter PJ Beyerhaus (ed.), *Weltweite Gemeinschaft im Leiden für Christus*. Nürnberg: VTR 2007, 208 p.

## **National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) Malaysia**

*www.necf.org.my*

**Report on the state of religious liberty in Malaysia for the year 2007.** Presented by The Religious Liberty Commission of the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) Malaysia to The Executive Committee National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) Malaysia, June 2008, 44 p. – <http://tinyurl.com/5oxpua>

“This report intends to review both government (local and federal) and judicial actions in three principal areas: the right to profess, the right to practise and the impact of Islamisation. All court’s decisions made in 2008 (before July) on cases mentioned in this report are placed on the footnote.”

From the introduction: “The Malaysian socio-political landscape grew even grimmer in 2007 as inter-ethnic, inter-religious and, of course, political tensions, which were already high in 2006, further heightened. Despite clear and increasing evidence of cracks in the nation’s social fabric, the top political leadership continued to insist that the bonds holding the different communities together were strong. In contrast to the past, when such religious matters were treated with much greater sensitivity, there were multiple high-profile incidents, such as conversions out of Islam, destruction of places of worship, confiscation of religious material and enforced burials by religious authorities in 2007. Confronted with aggressive denials by the government that anything was wrong and the apparent unwillingness to do anything about them, all ethnic minorities, especially Malaysians of Indian origin, grew more overtly frustrated and resentful. This led to growing support for the Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF) and for the subsequent street protests organised by it to voice the community’s discontent.”

## Religious liberty after 50 years of independence



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## The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

[www.uscirf.gov](http://www.uscirf.gov)

This commission was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress.

### Countries of Particular Concern

One of the most significant human rights acts of the U.S. government is the designation of "countries of particular concern," or CPCs, for ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom. CPC designation is not an end point, but the beginning of focused diplomatic activity required by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA) from which important obligations in the form of consequent actions flow. Pursuant to the IRFA statute, the Commission issues recommended responses for the President, Secretary of State, and Congress to follow up on the CPC designations. The Commission has

recommended that the following countries be designated as CPCs: Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam.

### **Watch List**

In addition to its CPC recommendations, the Commission has established a Watch List of countries where religious freedom conditions do not rise to the statutory level requiring CPC designation but which require close monitoring due to the nature and extent of violations of religious freedom engaged in or tolerated by the governments: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Cuba, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Nigeria.

### **Additional countries monitored**

In addition to countries designated as "countries of particular concern" (CPC) and Watch List countries, the Commission monitors conditions for freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief in several other countries, some of which have previously been designated a CPC or Watch List country: Georgia, India, Kazakhstan, Laos, Malaysia, Russia, Turkey. Among the more extensive documents issued by the USCIRF are its annual reports, policy briefs and special reports.

### **North Korea**

**A prison without bars:** Refugee and defector testimonies of severe violations of freedom of religion or belief in North Korea: Update on religious freedom conditions in North Korea and new interviews with former North Korean security agents. [Washington, D.C.:] United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, March 2008, 64 p, <http://tinyurl.com/6ygzkyz>

Religious freedom and other human rights conditions in North Korea remain among the world's most repressive, as the testimony of 32 refugees who fled to China from 2003 to 2007 and six former North Korean security agents who defected to South Korea during the past eight years confirms. There continues to be a pressing need on the international level for further, more effective action that addresses the ongoing repression of religious freedom and other human rights in North Korea and the problems of North Korean refugees in China. Refugees and religious adherents are particularly vulnerable, whether living in North Korea or the border regions in China. The findings

update a 2005 publication entitled: *Thank You Father Kim Il Sung – Eyewitness Accounts of Severe Violations of the Freedom of Thought, Conscience, and Religion in North Korea.*

### **Vietnam Policy Focus**

Summer 2008, 32 p, 25 August 2008, <http://tinyurl.com/5za9aa>

The report, which includes findings from the Commission's 2007 trip to Vietnam, highlights government-sponsored harassment, detention, and imprisonment faced by individuals and leaders of diverse religious communities. In light of these severe and widespread violations of religious freedom, the Commission calls on the U.S. State Department to re-designate Vietnam a 'country of particular concern' (CPC), under the terms of the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act.

### **2008 Annual Report**

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report, May 2008, 326 p, <http://tinyurl.com/6ejqn6>

While the work of the Commission is conducted year round, the Commission compiles an annual report of its policy recommendations in May to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress. This report covers the period from May 2007 – April 2008. Special focus is laid on three countries: Saudi Arabia, Vietnam and Turkmenistan.

“This annual report reviews the Commission’s activities during the past year and specifically describes conditions for religious freedom and related human rights in the countries of central concern to the Commission and highlights key findings; presents the Commission’s policy recommendations to ensure that the promotion of freedom of religion or belief becomes a more integral part of U.S. foreign policy, furthering both our nation’s humanitarian and national security interests; and reports on the actions the Commission has taken to raise public awareness of religious freedom violations, and summarizes the Commission’s efforts to keep Congress and the Administration informed of religious freedom conditions throughout the world. The wide array of activities and publications in this reporting period illustrates the major impact the Commission has on developing U.S. policy to promote religious freedom abroad. Commissioners have testified before congressional committees and caucuses, met with highranking U.S. Administration officials including Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, held hearings and

press conferences on pressing religious freedom issues, conducted fact-finding missions to other countries, and published numerous policy papers, press releases, and op-eds.”

### **Public Hearing on Advancing Religious Freedom and Related Human Rights in Iran**

February 21, 2008, <http://tinyurl.com/55tstu>

Testimonies of Witnesses:

- Jeffrey Feltman, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs
- Barbara Slavin, Senior Fellow, U.S. Institute of Peace & Senior Diplomatic Reporter, USA Today
- Suzanne Maloney, Senior Fellow, Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Brookings Institution
- Payam Akhavan, Co-Founder, Iran Human Rights Documentation Center & Professor of Law, McGill University
- Roya Boroumand, Executive Director, Boroumand Foundation for the Promotion of Human Rights and Democracy in Iran
- Paul Marshall, Senior Fellow, Center for Religious Freedom, Hudson Institute

### **WEA Mission Commission**

**Mission in contexts of suffering, violence, persecution and martyrdom.** Connections: the Journal of the WEA Mission Commission. Vol. 7. 1-2 2008, 84 p. 37 articles from practitioner, theological and best practice perspective. [www.weaconnections.com](http://www.weaconnections.com)



## 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

<b>Focus</b>	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.
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  - Brief biographical details of the author in the first footnote, linked to the name of the author, indicating, among others, year of birth, the institutional affiliation, special connection to the topic, and e-mail address.
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.
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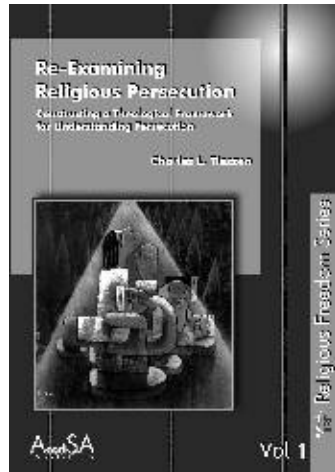
# Re-Examining Religious Persecution

Constructing a Theological Framework  
for Understanding Persecution

**Charles L. Tieszen**

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



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