

## ABSTRACTS GROUP 2

**Charles L. Tieszen, Ph.D.**

### **“In Communion at the Cross”: Defining the Religious Persecution of Christians**

#### **Abstract**

In my study *Re-Examining Religious Persecution* (AcadSA/VKW, 2008), I seek to offer a rigorous theological definition of the religious persecution of Christians. Previous studies, if they do not neglect theological reflection on persecution entirely, can be hampered by poor definitions of the term. My definition placed a theological understanding of persecution within a spectrum of mild to intense hostility and an experience of the event that is at once universal even as it manifests itself in different ways depending upon context.

Since the study’s publication, the definition has received wide support by many, but has also been met with some reluctance by others. Given the wide disparity between how

Majority World and Western Christians experience persecution, some are hesitant to contend that Christians from each of these areas experience persecution. How can Christians who know little of imprisonment or violence due to their faith say that they experience persecution?

In the proposed study, I will seek to address this disparity, emphasizing once again the universal and contextual natures of persecution, but also seeking to place a definition of persecution in the context of a global Church. To do so, the proposed study will draw from Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s pastoral work, *Life Together* and *Spiritual Care* in particular, in order to add needed ecclesiological reflection to a theological definition of religious persecution. In so doing, I hope to tease out how religious persecution, however one experiences it, must draw the Church together instead of pushing it apart.

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**Theodor Rathgeber**

### **Analysis and Assessment of Discrimination of and Hostility against Christians**

#### **Using the Human Rights’ approach as Methodology**

#### **Abstract**

Recent studies by the Pew Research Centre in 2009, 2011 and 2012 indicate an increasing threat to the Freedom of Religion or Belief (FORB) either by legislation and state activities or by social hostility in combination with State omission. The former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Asma Jahangir, noted in 2004 that until 2001 most of the complaints sent to her on violations of FORB were stemming from Christians. After the attacks of 09/11, the picture changed and she noted a significant increase of complaints by members of Muslim communities. Revising recent media reports in Western countries, the impression is left that Christians again are under particular attack, in numbers as well as in seriousness. While it is not clear whether the assessments in the media are made upon an increasing data collection or upon an increasing sensitivity for the issue. Sometimes, there is also the impression left that those assessments contribute rather to a numeric contest than to reflect the reality of religious communities – i.e. Christian churches – in substance.

The proposed paper and presentation will contribute to some methodological clarifications. The presentation is based on the human rights approach which provides well defined terms, criteria and a certain typology in order to identify discrimination, restriction, oppression and further forms of violations against FORB. The presentation will further contribute from a critical perspective to the debate on the term ‘persecution’, its methodological lacks of clarity and a methodological proposal to deal with those realities more accurately. Finally, the paper will argue that the combination of the

human rights approach together with existing pertinent studies on the ground will provide a comprehensive and numerically close overview about the situation of Christians related to religious freedom.

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**Dr. Daniel Höf,**

### **The Necessity of Persecution: Theological Insights from the Book of Revelation**

The book of revelation was written at a point of history where Christians for the first time faced and had to come to grips with massive, shocking and widespread persecution and martyrdom. It explicitly is a book of a persecuted Christian to persecuted Christians (1:9). In its first sentence it defines its content by explaining that God in it reveals what *must* happen soon. It therefore claims not just to reveal God's plan with humanity but especially the necessities in this plan. Persecution, massive and history spanning martyrdom is one of the major necessities that explicitly is spelled out in this book (6:11).

The talk unfolds the main perspective of this necessity for persecution by a careful analysis of the description of the fifth seal (6:9-11). By comparing the seals to their Old Testament equivalents it becomes obvious that the suffering of the persecuted messengers is an indispensable part of God's communication to people before His day. The prayer of the martyrs and God's answer to them in the fifth seal further solidify that by its very nature this form of testimony is unique and irreplaceable by any other one in God's plan. From here light is shed on the central role passages about persecution and martyrdom play in the book of revelation and should play in its exegesis and hermeneutics today.

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**Prof. Thomas K. Johnson, Ph.D.**

### **Freedom of Religion, Two Kingdoms Theory of Ethics, and Societal Well Being**

Abstract:

In light of the high level of documentation of the contribution of freedom of religion to societal well being, and in view of the extraordinary levels of religiously motivated violence and oppression, it would be worthwhile for evangelicals to reformulate the Reformation "Two Kingdoms" theory of social ethics in a manner that can be appropriated throughout the Body of Christ and perhaps be contributed from the Christian community into the broader global political culture. As a small step in this direction, we can begin to talk about the "Two-fold Work of God in the World" and make this theme a standard part of Christian ethics.

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**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Abdullah KIRAN\***

### **HOW A SOCIAL ENGINEERING PROJECT EFFECTED CHRISTIANS IN TURKEY?**

**Abstract:** Christianity originated to the Middle East and from this region it spread to the other parts of the world. At the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, Christian's population in the Middle East was around %20, but now it has dropped to the %5 and it's estimated that the present rate of Christian population, which is around 12 million, will drop to the 6 million by the year 2020. One might ask, why the number of Christians is dropping so rapidly? What is the reason behind this declination? The majority of Middle East countries known by their authoritarian charters and these oppressive regimes were not tolerable to their Christians citizens. But what about Turkey, which known as a secular country? Why

the number of the Christians in Turkey declined more than those authoritarian regimes of the Middle East? How a “secular” country could be so discriminative against its Christian minority? According to the Lausanne Treaty, the Christians were officially accepted as religious minorities and their minorities rights were under the guarantee of international law. But the Kemalist state mindset didn’t take into consideration the minorities rights of the Christians and persuaded a social engineering project against them. Actually, almost all segments of Turkey’s society were target of this policy, but the case of Christian was worse. While the aim of this social engineering project was to assimilate different ethnic groups into Turkish identity, for Christians there two alternatives: Either to become Muslim and Turk or to exile from the country. For Kemalist ideology the best citizen should be Laicist, Atatürkist, Sunni Muslim and Turk. Unfortunately, this frame didn’t leave the room for the Christian to be a proper citizen of Turkey.

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**Wolfgang Haede**, MTh (equiv)

Theological Tutor and Lecturer/ Doctoral Student at “University of South Africa”

### **Perceptions of Christians in Turkey – A Study of the Climate of Accusations against Christians in Turkish Newspapers**

There is a small but growing number of ethnic Turks in Turkey who embraced the Christian faith. They are confronted with so much prejudice in society that it is a great challenge for them to keep the identity of being Christian *and* Turk.

Somehow surprisingly the public perception of Christians in Turkey, one of the few working democracies in Middle East and being supposed to be near to the West, not only geographically but also in the country’s long time orientation, is worse than in many other countries with Muslim majority. The perception of Christians differs notably in different groups of society, but also manifests common traits.

I will give first results of my doctoral dissertation presenting findings of the climate of accusations against Christians as it is reflected in different Turkish daily newspapers. I will evaluate my findings against the historical and sociological background of modern Turkey

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**Annetta Vyssotskaia**, New Zealand

### **Review of Religious Freedom Situation for Christians in Central Asia (former USSR countries)**

Abstract

The Central Asian countries which were once part of USSR - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan - were included in Open Doors World Watch List 2012. All these countries experienced similar significant changes in religious freedom situation from the atheistic society during the communist period when all religions were criticised and persecuted in various ways, to the complete freedom of worship in early 1990-s after the Soviet Union collapse, and to the growing restrictions in religious legislation. Christians comprise a small minority in predominantly Muslim society and experience different kinds of persecution affecting their right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

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**YUSUFU TURAKI, PH.D., (PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY AND SOCIAL ETHICS)**

## **THE SYSTEMATIC PERSECUTION, MARGINALIZATION, DISCRIMINATION AND MARGINALIZATION OF CHRISTIANS OF NORTHERN ORIGIN IN THE NORTHERN STATES OF NIGERIA**

**ABSTRACT:** The primary objective of this paper is to analyze and address the issue of the systematic persecution, discrimination and marginalization of Christians of northern origin in the Northern States of Nigeria. Given the state and spade of frequent and the increasing magnitude of ethno-religious crises and conflicts in the Northern States of Nigeria since 1980 to the present, it is Christians of Northern origin that have suffered the most. The adverse consequences of these ethno-religious crises and conflicts have resulted in a state of a systematic persecution, discrimination and marginalization of Christians of Northern origin. The forms of persecution have manifested themselves in a systematic marginalization of Christians of northern origin in religious, political, social and economic affairs of their respective states since 1972 after the Military take-over of Mission Schools and Hospitals in Nigeria. Christians of Northern origins have been the subject of targeted killings, burning and bombings of their churches and property and along with other forms of discrimination and marginalization. But the manifestations of this ethno-religious phenomenon in the Northern States of Nigeria has been subjected to various and contradictory interpretations and analyses by social scientists. For this reason, this issue needs to be addressed urgently and properly. Firstly, the paper examines the systematic persecution, discrimination and marginalization of Christians of northern origin which has reached endemic proportions. This issue has not been adequately advocated, promoted and defended by both internal and international communities. Secondly, the world community does not have clear and true information and facts about the forms of persecutions, discrimination and marginalization of Christians of northern origin within the Northern States of Nigeria. It has been fed with bias and wrong reporting of information and facts about the state of affairs in the Northern States of Nigeria. Thirdly, methodologically, social scientists and the mass media have not addressed and analyzed adequately the root causes of the ethno-religious phenomenon in the Northern States of Nigeria. The results of social research, especially of journalists and mass media have only fed into the propaganda machine of the perpetrators of the ethno-religious crises and conflicts. Fourthly, there are no effective efforts or programmes that specifically address this issue of the systematic persecution, discrimination and marginalization of Christians of northern origin in the Northern States of Nigeria. There are no effective programmes on ground that are good enough to address and resolve the intractable issues of ethno-religious crises and conflicts in the Northern States of Nigeria.

How can the case of Christians of northern origins in the Northern States of Nigeria be adequately analyzed and addressed? This paper defines who are the Christians of northern origins, their identity and their inferior and socio-political role and status within the Northern States of Nigeria which make them easy targets for persecution, discrimination and marginalization.

The major research instrument that will be used in this paper is mainly qualitative, involving literature review, oral interviews and questionnaires. My personal experience as a social and ethical researcher in Northern Nigeria since the late 1970s is an asset in this paper. For this reason, in this paper, my presentation will be exploratory, historical, an analytical, descriptive and critical. Of recent, I have developed a new method of social inquiry and research on how to use primordial social factors as means of finding and addressing the historical root causes of crises and conflict in any human society. This new research method will be applied in this paper as means of finding the historical roots of ethno-religious crises and conflicts in the Northern States of Nigeria. This ethno-religious phenomenon makes Christians of northern origin an easy target for persecution, discrimination and marginalization in the Northern States of Nigeria

The paper traces the historical roots of crises and conflicts in the Northern States of Nigeria as from the pre-Islamic and pre-colonial periods to the present. Discussions on the subject matter of this paper covers African traditional, Islamic, Christian, colonial and contemporary values, structures and institutions and as well as the human transforming agents, such as the African traditionalists, Muslims, Christian missions, British colonialists, politicians and the soldiers. All these social factors combined together to create conflict generating structures which are the roots of ethno-religious crises and

conflicts in the Northern States of Nigeria. This is the very context within which the main subject of this paper is being discussed.

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Prof. (Emeritus) **Jacques PJ Theron**

Dept. of Practical Theology, University of South Africa

**Why did we allow that? Reflections by ex-members on the dynamics that led to joining a new religious movement.**

Abstract:

During the last half of the 1980s a group under the name “Mission Church”, “Lester Bloomberg’s group” or the “People of Brook house” started to stir some Christian circles in Pretoria and in South Africa as a whole. About 30 young people left their jobs or discontinued their respective study programmes and joined this group, severing ties with their families in the process (cf. Theron, 1993). More or less the same stories started to surface as those recorded by Pretorius (2012:143-158) in his discussion of coercion in new religious movements.

The group under discussion was disbanded later on. However, some of the former members are now asking themselves serious questions about what really happened in order for them to willingly allow other people to have so much power and influence over their minds, emotions, actions, relationships and spiritual insights.

The purpose of the present project is to find out from some of the previous participants what could have been done by them to prevent them from joining the group. Furthermore: how could the actions of family members, friends and even civil authorities have helped them to avoid their very negative and harmful experiences?

The research will be based on a narrative research methodology. Five to ten people will be contacted for in-depth interviews. Ethical guidelines regarding research projects as prescribed by the University of South Africa will be followed.

The result of the research could help people who are drawn to such groups as well as family members and friends to discern signs of coercion at an early stage. Insights gained might even help civil authorities to plan and act more strategically if necessary.

## **Proposal for the International Consultation on Religious Freedom Research**

**Daniel Röthlisberger**

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### **Title of proposed paper**

Contents and limits of assistance and self-help for persecuted Christians  
An exegetical-theological examination in a field of New Testament and early Christian ethics

### **Abstract**

From the beginnings of Christianity until the present time “suffering for the sake of belief” has been an integral component of being a Christian.

If harassment and persecution are one side of the coin, assistance and self-help to the benefit of the persecuted form the other side: The proposed paper not only gives a full systematic overview of the New Testament testimony on this subject, but also examines exegetically-theologically selected forms and actors of such assistance and self-help, including also misguided and criticized activities of some individuals. In doing so, the following questions concerning explicit and implicit ethics are most important: First, how far are *postulated* actions in the text mandatory for the original readers? Second, how far are the *given* action theologically legitimated by the text? Is there any legitimacy given at all? And which of the given actions from Jesus, Paul and others in response to persecution were intended to serve as a model to be imitated by the Christian readers?

Besides its aim to filling an academic void in the field of New Testament exegesis, this study will also be of interest for present-day churches, NGOs and individuals who search guidance in their struggle with restricted religious freedom.

### **Prof. Dr. Christof Sauer**

Associate Professor Extraordinary, Stellenbosch University, South Africa (Missiology)

External Promoter, University of South Africa (Missiology)

Main occupation: Co-Director, International Institute for Religious Freedom, (Bonn – Cape Town – Colombo)

### **A critical analysis of the new questionnaire of the World Watch List**

The „World Watch List“ (WWL) of the mission agency Open Doors (OD) which seeks to help persecuted Christians was initially developed as a confidential strategy planning instrument. With the annual publishing of the ranking of 50 countries where persecution of Christians for religious reasons is worst the quoting by media grew. So did the public criticism of its credibility by other experts in the field. Therefore OD now sees a need to increase the reliability and credibility of the WWL. This led to the involvement of an independent scholarly research institute in the design of the questionnaire and potentially in the execution of some of the research.

This paper examines the various aspects involved in measuring religious persecution, thereby comparing approaches to the WWL before and after scholarly intervention. It addresses the design of the questionnaire, the interpretation of the results and the selection and training of the respondents. Issues covered involve the selection of questions, their grouping, their respective weighing, and how to arrive at a final score for a country.

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**Mr. John Baxter-Brown, UK**

**Examining the joint WEA, Vatican and WCC document “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World” in the context of religious liberty**

**Abstract:**

This paper has three main sections.

First: it examines the theological foundations for human rights within the document “Christian Witness,” noting in particular how these can be developed and enhanced when the document is contextualized in areas of religious conflict or abuse of religious liberty.

Second: an analysis is given of some of the regions that have already adapted the text, such as India, and the implications these contextualizations have had for religious liberty and the ethical behaviour of Christians in such areas.

Third: the final section looks at some of the other ways the document has been received and its usefulness in contexts where there is greater struggle for religious liberty or where one particular religious group is persecuted and oppressed. At the grass-roots level, we will explore some questions such as: how can this text help in such situations and what are the practical steps towards raising its profile so that local leaders and political leaders will take notice and apply it in their own contexts.