

Is Involvement in the Fight Against the Persecution of Christians Solely for the Benefit of Christians?

Why Involvement in the Cause of Religious Freedom Should be a Central Political Issue for Everybody

The following lecture was given at the Church of the Cross (Kreuzkirche) in Dresden on June 6, 2007, at the annual meeting of the Dresden EAK of the Christian Democratic Union¹ in commemoration of the Augsburg Confession of June 6, 1530.

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1. Religion Has Returned to Politics

The wonderful beauty and vibrancy of the churches here in Dresden are a very appropriate image to symbolize the return of religion to the public square—something that would have been considered unthinkable just twenty years ago. Why? Those 3.3 million inhabitants of what used to be the German Democratic Republic who consider themselves to be ‘authentic’ atheists nowadays are an anomaly. They account for approximately 2.5% of ‘authentic’ atheists worldwide, whose estimated total number is 147 million and shrinking. The total number of atheists represents slightly more than 1.5% of the global population.

Perhaps no other number so clearly indicates just how our world has changed in the last fifteen years and why it remains difficult for many people in Germany to understand what a

central role religions are again playing in the future of the world, for better or for worse. For that reason, the question of whether it is possible to stop the global increase in restrictions of religious liberty and to strengthen existing religious liberty has a lot to do with how our political future will look. When the Minister of Defence commented that Germany's freedom would also be defended in the Hindu Kush in Afghanistan, the same applies all the more for the global effort for religious liberty.

When I was in school, the world appeared to become more secular and atheistic on a daily basis. A large number of Third World countries had to decide between two nonreligious blocs, the large Communist bloc, which included countries such as China and the Soviet Union, and the secularized Western countries. Bloc-free countries had to look out for their own politically secular future. For many, religion no longer had anything to do with politics. For some it was a type of folklore, such as the Oktoberfest, which perhaps had some private benefit. For others it meant intellectual confusion.

How different it is today: The atheistic-communistic world has shrunk to include only a few small countries such as North Korea. In China religion has grown enormously, and the leading country in the West, the USA, is experiencing a revival of Christianity such as has never been seen before. The entire Islamic world is awakening religiously, and even Turkey is again ruled by an Islamic party. Additionally, countries such as India and Indonesia are desperately trying to maintain their religious neutrality against Hindu and Islamic political nationalists. Political and even violent conflicts that have a covert or even overt religious aspect have returned and are the order of the day. In religiously torn countries such as Sri Lanka, Sudan, Nigeria, Timor, Israel/Palestine, the Philippines, and Indonesia, civil-war-like conditions are part of the daily agenda.

¹ The majority party in Germany.

There is good reason to be reminded that the ideas of human rights and religious liberty were born neither in a world without religion nor in a world of religious harmony but rather in a time of religious wars and their aftermath.

2. 1789: Two Paths of Progress toward Religious Liberty

Religious liberty means two things: it means the state takes no steps against particular religions; and it also means that various religions are allowed to peacefully coexist alongside each other. Both of these conditions are prerequisites for many other human rights.

Religious liberty, which was unknown for most of the world's history, has come at great cost and through a painful course of events in the Western world. A first step in the direction of religious liberty was the 1526 resolution of the Reichstag in Speyer. The resolution officially tolerated two (Christian) religions (Catholic and Protestant, meaning Lutheran) for the first time. The 1555 Peace of Augsburg expanded toleration, and gradually this included a third Christian confession, that of the Calvinist or Reformed churches. However, religious wars ensued in Central Europe as well as within France, England, and Holland. After suffering untold numbers of victims, Europe returned to the Peace of Augsburg via the Peace of Westphalia. One hundred years had been wasted. Nonetheless, Europe had had enough of religiously motivated or religiously veiled wars. Additionally, the religion-state system and demographic migrations accounted for the fact that more and more people lived in the 'wrong' regions, meaning regions where a religion other than their own was that of the state. Prussians first extended religious liberty beyond the Christian confessions mentioned in the Peace of Westphalia to include Arminians and others. Key steps were the Patent of Tolerance conferred by Joseph II in Austria in 1781. It gave Jews the first set of liberties, and the Prussian Land Law of 1794 extended rights. Gradually Jews were the first adherents of a non-Christian religion to be included. Still, general religious liberty in Germany has only been in place since 1919 under the Weimar Constitution, and truly comprehensive religious freedom has only been practiced since the acceptance of the 1949 Constitution. This is because the

1848 Constitution developed at St. Paul's church in Frankfurt am Main, which included rights of religious liberty, never came into effect. But let us return to the eighteenth century.

In 1789 two central constitutional documents, one in France and the other in the United States of America, provided the anchor for religious liberty that illuminates an antithesis to the prior history of religious liberty. The modern concept of religious liberty, which we have seen developing in the Christian world over the last two hundred and fifty years, has been achieved along two completely different paths of struggle. Both paths led to the separation of church and state, but they were pursued very differently, as is shown in present-day secular France and in the religiously friendly Germany and USA.

On the one hand, religious liberty was a struggle conducted against the churches. I am thinking primarily of the French Revolution. Coercion that did not allow others their liberty emanated from the Christian (Catholic) church and was supported by it. What its supporters wanted to struggle for, among other things, and what was indeed at least theoretically sought for, was freedom from a religion that forced a person to follow a certain religion. Often this led to a critical stance toward religion in general, eventually causing all religion to be rejected. In turn this easily led to a situation where other things, such as nationalism, became substitutes for religion. In practice this led to other forms of coercion that did not officially count as religion. But that is another story. The French Revolution did not necessarily lead to a situation where individuals were safer from reprisals than they had been before. Indeed, in this case, what we have is what we might call an "atheistic" or "religiously critical" struggle against the church for religious liberty. The French Revolution achieved religious liberty by pushing religion back in return for a very powerful and drastic state.

At about the same time, there was a completely different development in the USA (and at a later time in Great Britain, Holland, and Switzerland). In the USA, religious liberty was not accomplished against the church or against Christians but by Christians. In the USA, Christians from all sorts of churches, splinter groups, and sects wanted to live in freedom that

they had not been afforded in Europe, in a manner that was free from state coercion and free from the grasp of other religious groups. This freedom was set out in the 1636 Rhode Island Constitution to include atheists, pointedly demonstrating that developments in America were prior to those in France.

While in the USA it was Christian theologians and politicians who demanded religious liberty and brought it to pass, the Catholic Church in Europe – influenced by the clash with increasingly secularised European states – did not even recognize religious liberty as a correct stance until the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Until that time, at least as far as the standard Roman Catholic teaching represented for centuries by the Popes was concerned, one goal of the church was that as many people as possible in a given country belong to the one true religion. An important task of the state was to ensure that this one church legally, ethically, and morally had the final word. Protestants had already previously changed allegiances from one church to another. Today there is no question that a long time ago the viewpoint of eighteenth-century American Christians already carried the day in churches worldwide.

Evangelicals associated with the Alliance can show somewhat better results since from the beginning, the idea of religious liberty was connected with the Alliance. Evangelicals in Germany have historically been dependent on the conservative Christians in the USA and were always supporters of religious liberty. Even at the time when the Alliance was founded in London in the middle of the nineteenth century, it was in favour of religious liberty. Numerous national alliances grew out of a desire for religious liberty. Primarily Christians in the so-called “free churches” or Christians from smaller churches got together in order to seek the right to exist. At an early stage, Anglican priests brought in conservative German pastors from the state churches, and the topic of religious liberty was on the agenda at each major conference. In the nineteenth century, an appearance was made before the Turkish Sultan in an effort to support Orthodox Christians. International support from the Evangelical Alliance also came at the end of the nineteenth century for the protection of Jehovah’s Witnesses. That,

incidentally, would even be associated with difficulties nowadays. However, religious liberty is not partial. The Alliance specifically did not want Baptists to stand up only for Baptists, Lutherans only for Lutherans, and Jews only for Jews. Rather, the idea was that religious liberty needed to be pursued for everyone. The problem the Alliance had in its later history was more its severe restraint in societal and political issues, which has only been reversed in recent decades.

Historically, Christians have been found on both sides of the issue. On the one hand, there have been Christians who were against religious liberty, with apparently biblically based reasons, as long as the state was on their side. The Old Testament seemed to offer several possibilities for such a stance. On the other hand, there was an increasing number of Christians, theologians, and churches, chiefly from oppressed churches, who referred to the fact that biblical faith is a faith that cannot be reconciled with coercion. It cannot be forced or purchased. On the contrary, it has to be a fully voluntary decision.

For that reason, every missional thought that includes an effort to use state power or economic factors to produce Christians or to punish non-Christians has to be condemned. In the meantime, this viewpoint has become that of Christians worldwide. As strange as it may sound, the current viewpoint has been significantly promoted and spread by the ecumenical and evangelical missionary movement.

Even today, Christianity's conflicting prior history is still playing a role in the issue of human rights and in the particular case of religious liberty that we are addressing today. On one hand, we have the fact that the Christian church has had difficulties with the idea of religious liberty. This means that the church has had to see religious liberty asserted against its opposition. This is noticeable, for instance, in colonial history.

On the other hand, we can say that the entire concept of human rights and the question of religious liberty grew out of Christian roots and are a product of the Christian West.

Historically, this is not a point of contention. The theological reasons are the following:

1. The separation of church and state, and everyone's subordination under law as the highest binding constitution, began in the Old Testament. For Jesus, the supremacy of law was self-evident, and this has become accepted throughout Christianity in what was certainly an arduous process. In other cultural and religious milieus, however, this has been achieved only in part, and with difficulty, up to the present day.

Viewed historically, religious liberty is a right to defend against religions themselves. Religious liberty is also just as much a right to defend against the state. Since church and state used to be able to conjointly determine the religion citizens were to follow, individual religious liberty was possible only when the two were separated. A real separation of the two was first achieved for Germany in 1945/1949; otherwise, Hitler would not have been in a position to control the Kirchenministerium (Ministry of Churches).

2. For Christians, the ideas of human rights and religious freedom find their theological basis in all of mankind having being created in the image of God. This applies not only to the adherents of one's own religion. Rather, it expressly applies to all people. That this is not self-evident is seen in a comparison to Islam. Article 24 of the 1990 Cairo Declaration on Human Rights is formulated as follows: "All the rights and freedoms stipulated in this Declaration are subject to the Islamic Sharia." Article 25 supplements the statement: "The Islamic Sharia is the only source of reference for the explanation or clarification of any of the articles of this Declaration." Human rights are thus valid only in the manner supported by the Islamic Sharia, which does not grant equal rights to people of other religions.

3. Involvement in the Struggle against the Persecution of Christians Means Involvement in the Struggle for the Freedom of All Religions

At least three-quarters of all religious liberty violations worldwide are directed against Christians. As far as the killing of people because of their religious beliefs is concerned, the rate is probably in excess of 90 percent. The problem is also growing. 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 a inquiry by the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social 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.

The persecution of Christians is not only an issue for Christians, who according to their central statement of faith show solidarity with their suffering fellow believers (“If one part suffers, every part suffers with it.” 1 Corinthians 12:26 NIV). Rather, it is an issue for everyone who wants to support the cause of religious liberty. Wherever more 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 Germany means at the same time to help the Bahá'í, who are brutally persecuted in Iran too. Their cause for religious liberty is far less well 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 all adherents of all religions. As far as India and Indonesia are concerned, only Christians have at their disposal the infrastructure to publicize the human rights situation in these countries for the benefit of those living in these countries and internationally.

Involvement in the effort for human rights for Christians often directly helps a country's adherents of leading religious majorities. Involvement for the sake of converts to Christianity

from Islam in Afghanistan draws worldwide attention to the lot of many Buddhists and Muslims in that country. Only by involvement in the cause against the difficult lot of Philippine Roman Catholics in Saudi Arabia is attention 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. If one were to try to pray in Saudi Arabia at the wrong time, he would find himself in jail as fast as if he were to hang a cross somewhere. Sunni Islam has four different 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 on the forefront in various parliaments for workable 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 realization 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 between other religions. It also reports regularly on violence against adherents of all religions via its global network for the media and parliamentarians. Something similar applies for the global organizations of other confessions. Such an international commission includes affected members who have a very strong interest in seeing that their own countries in general—and not only Christians but *all*

inhabitants in particular—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 favorite political enemies (or within the context of the major enemies of the USA), as was the case for decades with Communism and since then with Islam.

As a Christian, I have written a book entitled *The Concept of an Enemy – Islam* (original German title *Feindbild Islam*). Many a person is astonished in the face of my critical publications regarding the relationship between Islam and human rights. However, as a Christian, I intend to shield everyone from slander—also from Christian slander—because with regard to Islam, or, for that matter, Communism, the following applies: “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16, NIV).

At the same time, there is an additional core reason why politicians and the states that they represent should be involved in the cause of persecuted Christians. Christians, apart from a few exceptions, consistently support the separation of church and state and in doing so support a state monopoly on the use of force. *This means that Christians simultaneously give up the possibility of protecting themselves against violence and persecution. Such a situation can only function 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 see force as a legitimate means in religious strife.*

4. Why Are Christians So Persecuted?

In the June 6, 2006, issue of the major German newspaper *Welt am Sonntag* (*World on Sunday*), Till-R. Stoldt commented that “eighty percent of all those people persecuted worldwide are Christians. Never before have they been more intensely persecuted. And nowhere are they more often discriminated against than in Islamic countries. This is the report of the International Society for Human Rights and the World Evangelical Alliance.” He continues, “No regime in the world wants to be watched when it is taking blood. Most of the

time public critique from a Western government is sufficient in order to prevent the killing of converts in Iran, Afghanistan or Nigeria. However, European politicians waver on consistently exercising this power, and promoters of human rights complain about this fact. Nevertheless, solidarity with Christians could aid in this clash of cultures, because Muslim and Hindu governments and aid organizations primarily help only their own people. This selectivity toward those needing help forces the West to also take on those who are 'not worthy' of help. This of course is not a reason to copy such selectivity. Rather, it means that in the future we need to be as ardently involved in the case for Christians as for Islamic Kurds, Bosnians, Kosovans or detainees in Guantánamo Bay. Tortured and threatened Christians also turn their hope to Europe because they are slandered and persecuted in Muslim countries as the Western world's 'fifth leg.' However, EU countries ignore this responsibility far more often than the USA does, and they remain in a position of restraint that amounts to an omission of assistance."

There is really nothing to add to this.

We want to pursue the question of specifically why it is that Christians are most often affected by religious liberty violations. Moreover, 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 made clear even in the Old Testament. 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 Kings 16-19). In John's Revelation, in addition to hatred for the church, there are political and economic reasons as well. An additional good example is the artisans, goldsmiths, and silversmiths in Ephesus (Acts 19:23-29), who saw a "danger" to their welfare (v. 27, NIV) in Paul's successful proclamation of the gospel and therefore instigated a riot. The irritation a slave owner experienced because of lost revenues when a fortune-telling spirit was driven out of a slave led a 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 persecution of Christians or restriction

of religious liberty, but the persecution is rather the case of an entanglement with existing problems of the respective culture and society.

Please note the following: If an adherent of a hated religion and bearer of a hated skin colour is tortured, one should neither play down the racism by saying 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 in reality affected very 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.² However, regarding content, Islam has historically been oriented against 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.

Only the three largest world religions are presently growing faster than is the world population. The world population is expanding at a rate of 1.22%. Hinduism is growing at a

² All the following numbers 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/globalchristianity/IBMR2006.pdf. Numbers from other researchers are similar. Numbers referring solely to Evangelicals are the most conservative, as most estimates reflect significantly higher numbers.

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 at an enormous rate of 2.11%. This development is making up for the shrinking of Christianity in the Western world. 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.

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

The point is neither to welcome this development nor to criticize it, but rather to simply make the observation that growth in non-Western Christianity is producing a 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 looks after them. According to the constitution, there is

to be a certain percentage of casteless people in all state occupations and state authorities. Suddenly, 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 conduct very little in the way of missions. 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 toward more content-oriented conversion work and peaceful missionary efforts.

What we had in Northern Ireland until recently makes us aware of what the rule was up to 400 years ago in Christianity. Today this leaves Christians aghast and is completely rejected. In the meantime, peaceful missions work and selfless social involvement have become the trademarks of Christianity. The number of foreign full-time Christian missionaries 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, and they increasingly use legal means and/or force against “foreign” religions. In India, this means thinking in terms of Hinduism and against Islam and Christianity, in Indonesia in terms of Islam and against Christianity and Hindu-Buddhism, and in Sri Lanka and Nepal in terms of Buddhism and against Christianity and Islam.

5. In many countries there is a growing connection made between nationalism and religion.

When one thinks of India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Pakistan alone, one-third of the world population is affected. In Turkey, 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 or quite a few national orthodox churches that have not followed the lead of other confessions, but they confirm the rule.

6. Christianity and a certain group of its representatives have in many locations become vocal and unerring voices for human rights and democracy.

The inherent Christian involvement for the cause of the weak and of minorities, which has not always or in all places been very pronounced, has in many locations become the trademark of Christianity. This is so much the case that Christians have become the classical targets of human rights opponents and tyrants in numerous countries of Latin America and in North Korea, mostly because they are just 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 that have Catholic priests or Baptist pastors killed, for instance, surely do not do this because they are interested in 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 and therefore stand in the way of Mafia bosses.

8. The peacefulness of Christian churches, which even often appears as true pacifism, invites the use of force since no resistance is feared. On a global stage, Muslims fear American retaliation but not a 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 in the security of the West can criticize them? Still, Christian churches have in the end agreed on non-violence but 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 and are suddenly raided by heavily armed militia.

9. Christians are often equated with the hated West.

To be sure, the West has for a while no longer been predominantly Christian. McWorld or pornography, which evokes images of the enemy for many, have actually nothing to do with Christianity. Churches in the Third World nowadays practically without exception operate independently and are under indigenous leadership. Still, native Christians are unable to escape suspicion. Turkish Christians are suspected of conducting espionage for the CIA. Chinese Christians are viewed as underlings of the USA or of the 'Western' Pope, and despite all the Western monetary support, 'Christians' in Palestine are still considered underlings of Zionism.

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

As Paul wrote, Christians ultimately see themselves as people who, beyond having their national citizenship, are bound to all other heavenly citizens (Philippians 3:20). According to Jesus, the church understands itself to be multicultural and extending beyond any national borders (Matthew 28:18). This can be seen as a threat, just as can enormous international personal, idealistic, and financial interconnections. 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 incalculable power factor.

The Chinese government 'cannot' and does not want to believe that no one 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 separate directions. That the Pope only appoints indigenous bishops and does not seek to interfere in China's political affairs is something that the Chinese government 'cannot' and does not want to believe. This is in spite of the fact that in Poland the Pope recently prohibited 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 organization in its country could be run from a foreign country. China has this in common with a lot of countries in the world. It would therefore be sensible for politicians to convey the suggestion 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 elicits incredulous astonishment, but it is followed by considerable interest.

As a point of criticism, it should be noted that some of American Christian missions work, and occasionally the manner of those from other countries, can awaken the false impression that there is a sort of worldwide strategy to conquer that is emanating from the USA. Since American Christian television technically, and because of the language, reaches the entire world, this can have a frightening effect. Also, when missionary events continue to use the previously common word *crusade*, it should come as no surprise that many take the word literally.

5. 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 is included in the term religious liberty? It is interesting to note that religious liberty first of all contains the right to change one's religion and worldview! This has to be expressly stated nowadays. Religious conversion is something that generally no one takes lightly, but in the public view in the West, it is seen as an unnecessary cause for trouble. However, the right to convert from one religion to another was the basic design of religious liberty. Why? It was the original experience of Europeans and of Europeans who emigrated to America that when a Catholic became a Protestant he or she, in the best case, had to leave the country and, of course, vice versa as well. Religious conversion within Christianity, as a result of inner conviction, is the primordial cell or origin of the question 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 has 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." But then I usually say to them, "For a long time now in Iran it's no longer Western missionaries but indigenous people who evangelize. The result is that for whatever reasons native Iranians leave Islam for Bahá'í or in order to 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 count on other consequences of a civil nature?" That 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 faced a host of civil consequences.

Religious liberty in our country means that fortunately we have increasingly uncoupled religious affiliation from civil status. Someone can today stand at a public marketplace and propagate something religious (or political) without his employer, who happens to come by, being able to fire him for it. This benefits Christians, atheists, Muslims, as well as adherents of anthroposophy and was precisely the primordial cell of the question 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 religion or worldview, but rather that a person may practice the 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 no adult German would accept for himself.

Every religious community needs conviction or some sort of pressure and coercion in order to keep its adherents. Everyone who has children knows that. Either one communicates convictions of why people should remain with their own religion, or one has some sort of societal pressure that ensures that they will not want to change or cannot change. You can observe this in traditional religions as well as in highly industrialized, 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 will believe, that in itself is a case where human rights have been violated.

6. Peaceful Missionary Work as an Example of Religious Liberty

Peaceful missions 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 German Constitution as well as in the 1948 United Nations' Declaration on Human Rights. Missionary activity is nothing other than the freedom of expression. Just as political parties, environmental groups, and even advertisers and the media in a country publish their view of things, so the same applies to religions.

In Germany, according to applicable law, as well as in worldwide human rights standards, peaceful missionary work is a part of religious liberty. The attorney Gabriele Martina Liegmann defines it as follows: "The right to freedom of religious confession has to do primarily with categories of speech and the expression of religious content, and it ensures the right to express individual religious convictions to the surrounding world and to plead for them everywhere in public. . . . Embraced in the right to the freedom of religious confession is, in particular, the freedom to conduct missions work. This includes the elements of promoting one's own religion and of winning others away from another belief."

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. Gottfried Küenzlen writes along these lines that religious liberty "is not just 'negative religious liberty,' the core of which is that no citizen can be forced to make a religious confession or hold membership in a religious or worldview community. It extends to also include a 'positive religious liberty,' as this is repeatedly emphasized in the legal literature relating to the Constitution. Precisely due to the

dictates of state religious neutrality, positive religious liberty consists in preserving citizens the possibility of asserting their religious and worldview convictions in public life as far as possible.” Thus the secular state behaves neutrally toward religion but not indifferently. Paul Mikat, as he records a comment of the former Supreme Court judge Roman Herzog, summarizes thus: The basic right of religious liberty takes into account the need of people for a worldview and life orientation. Herzog comes to a conclusion worth considering: The liberal democratic state, oriented toward the fundamental principle of human dignity on the basis of the legal recognition of this need, is hindered by an overall indifferent or even disapproving attitude toward churches and religious communities, the most important functions of which include the satisfaction of this basic anthropological desire. One needs to note that such a ‘positive religious liberty’ not only indicates an individual right. It possesses even more a corporate validity, as is evident in related decisions by the German Supreme Court expressly relating to religious communities and their avenues for public activity. Religious liberty therefore includes the right to public proclamation, societal action, and unimpeded missions work.

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 missions in the past that served as grounds for violence and oppression. Christian and Islamic crusades and colonialism come to mind. The problem here is not the public propagation of one’s own views. Rather, it is the oppression of human rights. The problem, then, is one of violence, and the term “mission” is certainly out of place. We should also not forget that, for instance, the predominant 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 to formulate it very briefly: *In the future, the alternative is not whether all countries and religions can be won over to restraining themselves from trying to win people over to their religions, that is, whether we can successfully get people to refrain from missions in the sense meant by areligious people—as if atheism isn't also globally spread in a missional manner. The alternative will be whether we can rally all countries and religions to enable peaceful missions work among each other and to refrain from all violent or societal pressure, or whether the spread and protection of religions will occur by means of violence instead of missionary efforts.*

7. Public Religion as Religious Liberty

At first glance, when one speaks about human rights, the topic of religious liberty appears to be a very simple issue. This is because of the fact that we have the idea that religion is a private issue. This is at least the case for the Western world. Religious liberty is a good thing, and every person should privately embrace his or her religion. Since most religions practice their official beliefs in buildings of some sort, religions should do what they want in churches or mosques. As long as no other crimes are committed, what they do within their own four walls is no one'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 belongs to those that are the most difficult to substantiate and to cast into law and 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. 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. That goes for Marxism and for Christianity just as much as nowadays in Germany, where there is a muddled worldview mix. Whoever wants to totally privatize religious liberty 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 all hang together closely with basic religious and worldview ideas.

Even when globally valid principles are found, it becomes really difficult when one considers that religious liberty hangs together with 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, foundationally as well as when we are dealing with concrete application. How do church and state, religion, and politics conduct themselves? *If we tear the two of them too far apart and place them opposite each other, religious liberty is just as much lost as if they are too closely aligned. If religion and the state are too closely associated, that means that a certain religious preference rules the state and is used to oppress others. If religion and the state simply face each other, that virtually leads to an oppression of one or all religions.*

Today's anniversary of the Augsburg Confession of 1530 reminds us that Germany has proceeded upon a stony path in answering this question but that for the present moment it has found a rather happy balance. For this reason, German politicians should increasingly have the courage to promote the idea of religious liberty for all people around the world, theists as well as atheists.