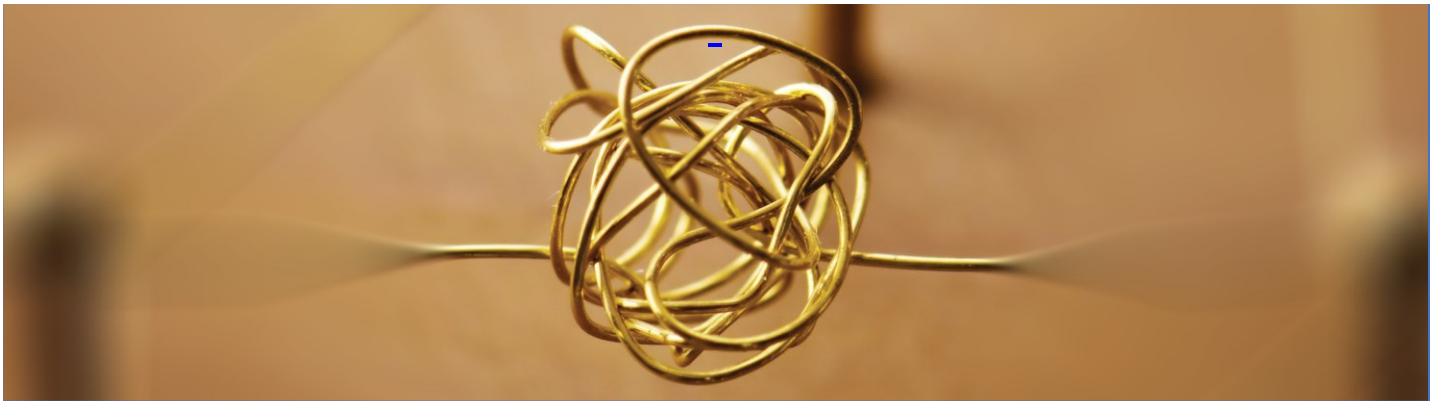

Propagation and (de)conversion: Conflict of individual and group rights?

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL ISFORB CONFERENCE
ETF LEUVEN, 2-3 MAY 2024

****** SCHEDULE of 01/05/2024 ******

Thursday, 2 May 2024

9:00-10:00	Arrival, registration & coffee	
10:00-11:45	**PLENARY SESSION 1**	
	Welcome & Mutual introductions I	
	Meanings of propagation, (de)conversion, and related word-fields: Disambiguating terminology in the context of FORB Prof. Dr Christof Sauer (FIUC/ETF Leuven)	
12:00-13:00	**PAPERS SESSION 1**	
	Room A	In search of a new identity: Conversion as a process of affective and cognitive changes (Reinhold Strähler)
		The Complexities of Conversion, Identity and Context (Bernhard Reitsma)
	Room B	Contextual influences on post-conversion life: Perceptions of converts from Islam to Christianity in Muslim-majority regions (Joel Hartmann – online)
		Balancing Priorities: Individual Rights vs. Community Welfare in Law (Varughese John – online)
	Room C	Differential Legal Citizenship & Religious Identification: A Case of Pakistani Ahmadis and Christians in the wake of the broader Religious Minority Discourse (Shuham Charles)

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13:00-14:00	Lunch	
14:00-15:15	**PLENARY SESSION 2** Mutual introductions II **The effects of conversion in Muslim-majority countries** Prof. Dr Maurits Berger (Leiden University)	
15:15-16:15	**PAPERS SESSION 2**	
	Room A	The Danger of World Jewry. Gerhard Kittel and Jewish proselytism: a Critical Discourse Analysis (Anne-Catherine Pardon)
		Walking the road less traveled? Michel Oukhow's unexpected road to unbelief (Niels de Nutte)
	Room B	Muslims responding to Christian converts in Pakistan: how does this vary and why? (Tim Green – online)
		Media coverage on the Persecution of Christians (Sina Hartert – online)
	Room C	Defense Code of Georgia - Challenge to The Freedom of Religion or Belief and The Right to Equality (Archil Metreveli)
		In the Palm of a Communist Regime: Emerging Threats to Freedom of Religion or Belief (Grace Gaffet)
16:30-17:30	**PAPERS SESSION 3**	
	Room A	"We have to love the people whom we serve!": Advice of a Turkish martyr to be for Christians witnessing to Turks – in comparison with recommendations of the "Lausanne Occasional Paper: Understanding Muslims" (Wolfgang Häde)
		The Maccabees and the Freedom of Religion or Belief (Geert Lorein)
	Room C	Proselytism and Religious Symbols in Public Schools of Georgia (Archil Jangirashvili)
		The Religious Believer in a Liberal Democracy's Public University and the Limiting Dimensions of Propagation and Conversion (Shaun de Freitas)
19:00	Conference Dinner	

Friday, 3 May 2024

8:00-9:00	Breakfast (Optional)	
9:30-10:45	**PLENARY SESSION 3** **Women's Orthodox Calvinist and Apostolic Religious Exits in the Netherlands** Prof. Dr Nella van den Brandt (KU Leuven)	
11:00-12:00	**PAPERS SESSION 4**	
	Room A	Baptism - then what? The relationship between motivation for conversion and consequent challenges for Arabic speaking converts in the German context (Heidi Josua)
		Apostasy from Islam and Baptism into Christianity (Duane A. Miller)
	Room B	Propagating hope – perspectives on hope and persecution (Petra Laagland-Winder)
		From Μαρτυρία to Martyrdom: The Slippery Slope of the Semantic Shift (Yevgeny Ustinovich)
	Room C	The Insult to Religious Feelings vs. The Freedom of Expression in Georgian Legislation and Case-Law (Ketevan Gegiadze)
		Rights in Question: Interrogating India's Anti-Conversion Laws Amidst Historical Complexities and Human Rights Struggles (Shilpi Pandey)
12:00-13:00	**PAPERS SESSION 5**	
	Room A	Farsi-Speaking Converts from Islam to Christianity: Disengagement from their Evangelical Churches (Olga Penner)
		Challenges of Western Theological Education in view of Oriental Christians with Muslim Background (Hanna Josua)
	Room B	Embracing Liberated Liminality: A Comparative Evaluation of the Status and Role of Two BMB Churches in the Struggle for the Freedom of Thought, Conscience, and Religion in Iran and in Algeria Today (Patrick Brittenden and Parsa Zarin Ghalam – Online)
		Apostasy and Exclusion from a Social Identity Perspective (Jack Barentsen – Online)
	Room C	Strategies of Muslim missionaries (Selam Bruk)
		Digital Dissent: Decoding the Critical Discourse of Francophone Ex-Muslims on X (Deborah Phares)
13:00-14:00	Lunch	
14:00-15:00	**PLENARY SESSION 4: the GAPS conversation**	
15:00-16:00	**PAPERS SESSION 6**	
	Room A	Can Mission prevent Arrogance at all? A theological study (M. Adt)
		The Church Amidst the War of Attrition: Ukrainian Evangelical Community in Search of a New Mission Paradigm (Roman Soloviy)
	Room C	Panel: State Obstacles to Propagation: A Comparative View of France, Japan, and Taiwan (with Rosita Šorité, Massimo Introvigne, Shane Brady, Liu Yin-Chun, Hsieh Hui-Yi, Eric Roux and Yvo Bruffaerts)
16:00-16:15	**PLENARY SESSION 5:** Closing words	

PLENARY SESSION 1 (Thu, 10:00-11:45) | Chair: Jelle Creemers To the top ↑

Meanings of propagation, (de)conversion, and related word-fields: Disambiguating terminology in the context of FORB

Prof. Dr Christof Sauer (FIUC/ETF Leuven)

The task of this paper is to disambiguate terminology connected to the conference theme. What do we mean when we use terms like propagation, proselytism, mission, evangelism, dawah, conversion and deconversion? How are they used in connection with freedom of religion or belief and religious persecution? Researching freedom of religion or belief is the unifying interest at ISFORB conferences. Thus, the specific topic of propagation and (de)conversion is mainly examined in that framework.

But we might face challenges in communication, due to our multilayered diversity. Research usually happens in communities of peers that develop diverging theories and coin varying preferential language even within one and the same discipline.

We not only come from different such communities but also from various countries and do our research in different languages. And we might discover that one and the same term might have different connotations in different cultures.

Our research is also diverse with respect to the predominant scholarly discipline in which we are trained or where we are institutionally affiliated. There is research on these topics in theology, missiology, religious studies, political sciences, sociology, law, international human rights studies, anthropology, Islamic studies, gender studies, to name a few. Each discipline brings with it specific interests, works within specific paradigms, and potentially approaches our subjects from different angles. We might discover that some of us are using different terminology to describe one and the same reality.

Thus, this paper is asking: (1) What is key terminology used in various scholarly disciplines surrounding the phenomena of religious or worldview propagation and conversion? (2) How are these terms differently understood in various disciplines? (3) Is it possible to recommend any common or preferential understanding of some of these terms in the framework of FORB research?

The aim is to create transparency, to foster mutual understanding and thus facilitate meaningful discussion across disciplines and cultures.

The presenter speaks from the perspective of a professor of protestant Christian theology, more specifically religious studies and missiology, and further specialized on freedom of religion or belief and the study of persecution of Christians.

PLENARY SESSION 2 (Thu, 14:00-15:30) | Chair: Bosco Bangura To the top ↑

The effects of conversion in Muslim-majority countries

Prof. Dr Maurits Berger (Leiden University)

Unlike Christians, Muslims do not have a missionary tradition. From a very early stage this resulted in an arrangement with existing non-Muslim religions in the Islamic realm. This has continued until today and has its effects on the way that missionary activities are being perceived. In this paper I will discuss the impact of Christian missionary activities in Muslim-majority societies, and the reasons why many Muslim states vehemently oppose such activities. For this, I will expound how conversion is perceived and regulated, on a social as well as legal level, and how and why in many Muslim majority countries missionary activities touch upon the notion of state security. We will see that the aversion of many of

these countries against Christian missionary activities is not mere aversion against Christianity or a simplistic protection of Islam but is deeply connected to their perception of public order.

PLENARY SESSION 3 (Fri, 9:30-10:45) | Chair: Christof Sauer

To the top ↑

Women's Orthodox Calvinist and Apostolic Religious Exits in the Netherlands

Prof. Dr Nella van den Brandt (KU Leuven)

What does it mean for people to lose faith and leave the religious community that has been formative for an important part of their lives? What does religious exit mean for those whose lives were shaped by discursive traditions that embraced exclusivist notions of truth and salvation? How is leaving religion informed by gendered and sexual experiences of being in the world? How does belonging to encapsulating Christian communities complicate religious exit? This lecture explores women's religious exit in the Netherlands. It draws on life story interviews with women who disengaged from various orthodox Calvinist churches and Apostolic communities. For these women, losing faith and leaving their communities meant that they found themselves on a threshold between their former religious tradition and others/the world. This non-linear process of transformation can be called liminal, which refers to women's framing of their experiences of being conflicted, feeling 'in-between' and lacking belonging. Furthermore, liminality is a period during which change occurs in terms of individual faith, knowledge and social relations. In looking at women's religious exit as experiences of liminality, we will focus on negotiations of notions of self, others and belonging. The lecture thus aims to generate a better understanding of what it means, socially and personally, to be in a liminal state and feeling that one can or does no longer belong to a certain religious group. No longer belonging is ambivalent, as this state is shot through with notions of both freedom and loss, and joyful as well as painful (dis)connections.

SMALL PAPERS SESSION 1 (Thu, 12:00-13:00) | Chair: Bernhard Reitsma To the top ↑
ROOM A

In search of a new identity: Conversion as a process of affective and cognitive changes (Reinhold Strähler)

The conversion of Muslim refugees to the Christian faith in recent years has brought the topic to the public attention in Europe and made it the subject of asylum procedures. As Muslims are on a spiritual journey that leads them eventually to accept Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, they go through a process that develops over a period of time through phases with a cognitive and an affective dimension. Changes with regard to convictions and with regard to attitudes take place simultaneously on several "layers" of both dimensions, eventually leading to a new faith allegiance. These changes are influenced by different significant factors, leading to consequences for the convert in the form of a transformation as well as in changed relationships with the community.

In the time after their conversion, converts face many challenges, which are closely intertwined. They have a strong desire to be accepted by the new faith community to which they have turned. However, this is linked to the search for a new identity and the question of the extent to which their previous identity has changed, should change or should not change.

Understanding the dynamics of conversion processes will help employees of state institutions who have to decide professionally on conversions as a reason for asylum. At the same time, it enables Christians who accompany people who show interest in the Christian faith and want to be baptized, as well as anyone interested in the topic, to better understand converts and accompany them on their journey.

The Complexities of Conversion, Identity and Context (Bernhard Reitsma)

Conversion puts interreligious dialogue under pressure. This is specifically so in the context of conversions from Islam to Christianity. It highlights the tensions between issues of identity, honor and shame, the preservation of religious communities and the freedom to change one's religion. What would be a helpful Christian Theological and Missiological response to these tensions? Does the desire for conversion not obstruct living peacefully together in multireligious (community-orientated) societies, since it basically qualifies other religious and social identities as false? Should we not abandon mission, striving for God's Kingdom and da'wah completely and simply work for the common good?

SMALL PAPERS SESSION 1 (Thu, 12:00-13:00) | Chair: Tatiana Kopaleishvili To the top ↑
ROOM B

Contextual influences on post-conversion life: Perceptions of converts from Islam to Christianity in Muslim-majority regions (Joel Hartmann – online)

In the last few decades, in many Muslim-majority regions there have been large numbers of conversions from Islam to Christianity. This paper seeks to shed some light on contextual influences on the situation of converts *after* their conversion. The various spheres of a prevailing Islamic context need to be considered. This includes religious, social, cultural, legal and political aspects. Although Islamic contexts vary from region to region, a comparison of the different experiences of converts throughout Muslim-majority regions shows a number of similar dynamics. In addition to the Islamic context, the converts' relations to existing historical churches in Muslim countries needs to be considered. As Christian religious minorities, both the historical churches with their 'dhimmi' status and the new converts with their 'apostate' status show specific characteristics. The paper argues that lack of belonging can be seen as a major experience among Christian

converts from Islam, in relation to both, the Islamic community and the historical churches. The findings presented are based on the voices of converts, gathered, and analyzed using empirical research methods.

Balancing Priorities: Individual Rights vs. Community Welfare in Law (Varughese John – online)

The introduction of the common law system in India via British law, which prioritizes the individual as the holder of rights, has sparked ongoing debate within the Indian political and legal sphere over the past decades. There's a growing sentiment advocating for a legal system more aligned with regional values rather than adopting what is seen as a 'foreign' English system. This shift is particularly evident in the interpretation of freedom of religion (FoRB) within the Indian context.

Given that difficulty in altering the legal framework at the federal level, several Indian states have taken steps to address this by introducing Freedom of Religion Bills aimed at regulating conversions to non-Indic religions. Concurrently, these laws promote conversions to Indic religions by incentivizing re-conversions through activities like 'ghar-whapsi' or homecoming.

This paper aims to delve into the intricacies of this multifaceted issue and its implications for the future.

SMALL PAPERS SESSION 1 (Thu, 12:00-13:00) | Chair: Anne-Catherine Pardon To the top ↑ ROOM C

Differential Legal Citizenship & Religious Identification: A Case of Pakistani Ahmadis and Christians in the wake of the broader Religious Minority Discourse (Charles Shuham)

At first glance, one is prone to gloss the issue of (religious) minority discourse in Pakistan. In most studies, religious minorities are clustered together, and their situation is evaluated against the backdrop of the dominant Muslim identity in Pakistan. Yet, this article argues that religious minorities in Pakistan are not homogeneous. Each minority group faces certain distinct challenges. To better address the concerns of religious minorities, a comparative approach needs to be employed, where individual religious minority groups are to be compared and assessed. Their challenges and needs can be reviewed and as a result, tailored policies can be devised to focus on challenges faced by them. This paper will discuss the case of legal citizenship and identification among Pakistani Ahmadis and Christians. While the 1973 constitution of Pakistan clearly demarcates its citizens between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens, it is the Ahmadi case of heterodoxy upon which the citizenship issue hinges. Christians, while they face the brunt of blasphemy laws, their primary issue, is associated with casteism, the law does not explicitly forbid their self-identification or religious practice. Moreover, Christians did not experience an overnight citizenship status change. 1974 amendment constituted a crossroad in Pakistan's history in which the conditions of the "Muslim country" were (re)constructed to exclude the Ahmadi community from the parameters of Muslim citizenship. Thus, authentic Pakistani Muslim identity is constructed predicated against a "heretical" identity. It accentuates an atypical nature of the Pakistani state, whose identity is contingent upon the renunciation to others a right to their self-identification and beliefs in a religious sense. This in turn implies that loyalty to the state rests on theological adjudication. This ontologically changes the role of the state from protector of religious freedom to the custodian of religious belief.

SMALL PAPERS SESSION 2 (Thu, 15:15-16:15) | Chair: Massimo Introvigne To the top ↑
ROOM A

The Danger of World Jewry. Gerhard Kittel and Jewish proselytism: a Critical Discourse Analysis (Anne-Catherine Pardon)

Gerhard Kittel (1886-1948) was a Lutheran theologian and member of the Nazi Party. As a New Testament and Jewish Studies scholar, one of his main areas of expertise involved the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. Diffusing his thought both through Nazi channels (e. g. the journal *Forschungen zur Judenfrage*) and in academic settings (e. g. a public lecture at the University of Vienna (1943)), Gerhard Kittel is often denounced as having provided a theological framework for Nazi ideology.

From 1937 onwards, the scholar recurrently explicates his stance on Jewish proselytism. Especially Kittel's work for the aforementioned Nazi journal reveals a crystallization of his thought on the matter while drawing actively on his expertise. By means of a critical discourse analysis, it will become clear how Kittel seeks to connect the concept of proselytism in Judaism with a notion of power, Jewish unfaithfulness to the Law and the myth of world Jewry. By doing so, Kittel not only negatively perceives the motives of (allowing for) conversion but also presents proselytism as a Jewish tool to gain control and dominate the earth.

Walking the road less traveled? Michel Oukhow's unexpected road to unbelief (Niels de Nutte)

Belgian humanist Michel Oukhow (1926-1997) did not use any nonreligious identifiers to describe himself, but his life as the son of a Russian immigrant was nevertheless shaped into that of an atheist. His 'road' was an unexpected one. Growing up in Antwerp as son to a Russian father in exile and a Dutch mother with a firm protestant background, his inquisitive nature comes to see both of these deities as human constructionism. In the autobiography of his childhood years, *Het verbrande testament* [the burnt testament] he describes the feelings he associates with being confronted with the stern god of his mother and the god of his father which he feels is much more tolerant.

His biography forms quite a contemplative description of the communities built around both iterations of the christian deity. Oukhow describes what draws people to these religious groups and what those contexts bring to some of those involved. Especially his analyses of the impoverished tsarist Russian group is of interest in this regard.

And yet, Oukhow himself breaks away, or deconverces. He resembles his generation of Belgian seculars in being disillusioned with the great ideals of the -isms. A historian and philosopher, he becomes the owner of a difficult humanism. Not a positivist, hooray humanism, but one that cherishes history as an archive of well-intended trial and error. The misery of his time needs no grand solutions, it in itself is enough to demand action.

SMALL PAPERS SESSION 2 (Thu, 15:15-16:15) | Chair: Christof Sauer To the top ↑
ROOM B

Muslims responding to Christian converts in Pakistan: how does this vary and why? (Tim Green – online)

My PhD research (SOAS University of London 2014) used a multidisciplinary approach to explore issues of identity for Christian converts from Islam in Pakistan. Drawing on sociological theory, I proposed a framework for understanding convert identity which subsequently became influential among other researchers. This provided a lens for my anthropological field research with 32 Muslim-to-Christian converts in a specific city of Pakistan. The findings were analysed with help from psychology, history and Islamic

jurisprudence. I will present findings and analysis from the chapter of my dissertation which explores how and why Pakistani Muslims react to those who convert to Christianity. This paper thus addresses these questions:
- How do Muslim reactions to converts vary across a range from more severe to less severe persecution, and how does this evolve over time? I present a typology which may be useful for other researchers conducting similar studies.
- Why do the reactions vary between Muslim relatives, wider society and officialdom?
- What part do negative collective identity ascriptions ('apostate', 'sweeper') play in the severity of reaction?
- What is the influence of shariah law of apostasy on the treatment of converts today?
- Why does severity increase for those converts who actively propagate their Christian faith?
- How does the powerful social value of 'honour and shame' affect the punishment of converts as religious deviants, and how does this compare with the punishment of sexual deviants in Pakistani society?
- When does family love moderate the dictates of family honour?
Reports on persecution of Muslim-to-Christian converts in Pakistan are often superficial because they fail to explore these questions. Rich data from my field study, combined with a multi-disciplinary analysis, allows much more nuanced and useful conclusions to be drawn.

Media coverage on the Persecution of Christians (Sina Hartert – online)

The paper explores the question of how the topic of persecution of Christians is dealt with in German print and online editorial offices and which reasons are decisive for this. The study provides findings that apply to Germany, but similar tendencies can certainly be identified for other (especially Western) countries.
Although 360 million Christians are persecuted worldwide and in some places this persecution is reaching genocidal proportions, there is a lack of attention in the West. Archbishop Casmoussa from Mosul says: "The media have so far largely ignored this catastrophe, almost as if a news blackout had been imposed here." And Markus Rode from Open Doors Germany criticises: "When it comes to religious freedom for Christians, this is largely ignored by Western governments and media. If a holy book is burned in a Western country - which is reprehensible - there are media earthquakes and an emergency meeting of the UN Human Rights Council. By contrast, thousands of Christians murdered by Islamists often don't even seem worth a side note."
Is it a boycott or are there professional criteria responsible for the lack of coverage of this issue?
In seven interviews with journalists conducted as part of a bachelor thesis, reasons for quantity and quality deficits in media coverage were identified: Dwindling interest of secular readers in religious topics, journalistic selection criteria such as news factors, instrumentalisation by right-wing populist movements, lack of information, and limited budgets and correspondents in foreign reporting. Journalists' lack of religious literacy, their personal world views and (often unconscious) associations with Christianity influence reporting.
All these reasons - especially journalistic selection criteria, the status quo of foreign reporting and the relationship between journalists and religion - will be elaborated in the paper. Finally, ideas will be presented on how the topic can possibly be given more media presence.

SMALL PAPERS SESSION 2 (Thu, 15:15-16:15) | Chair: Rosita Šorité To the top ↑
ROOM C

Defense Code of Georgia - Challenge to The Freedom of Religion or Belief and The Right to Equality (Archil Metreveli)

In 2023, the Parliament of Georgia ratified the new Defense Code of Georgia. The Code no longer includes the "Ministerial Exception" provided by previous legislation (the Law of Georgia on Military Duty and Military Service). Hence, no Minister of any religion previously exempted from military service will any longer be able to have this privilege. However, the Constitutional Agreement between the State of Georgia and the Orthodox Church of Georgia, which exempts from military service exclusively the Ministers of the Orthodox Church, remains in force. As the Constitutional Agreement takes hierarchical precedence over the Laws of Georgia (including the Defense Code of Georgia), the new legislative order does not nullify this privilege for the Orthodox Ministers.

In addition, to the fact, that the new legislation establishes discrimination based on religion, it also creates risks to the Freedom of Religion and Belief, itself. In particular, new amendments demonstrate the State's desire to establish the legal definition of "Religion", to restrict the Right to Fair Trial, to interfere with the personal space of citizens by gathering information about the religious affiliation of military personnel and conscripts, etc.

The presented paper will describe the mentioned issues in light of the Freedom of Religion of Belief and the Right to Equality and Non-Discrimination. The paper also aims to describe and criticize the Georgian FoRB legislation's twofold nature, which implies that one part of the legislation provides exclusive privileges to the Orthodox Church of Georgia, while the second one, regulates the activities of all other religious groups and associations.

In the Palm of a Communist Regime: Emerging Threats to Freedom of Religion or Belief (Grace Gaffet)

According to the Sino-British Joint Declaration, after the handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR/HK) is directly under the authority of the People's Republic of China, yet the city would retain a high degree of autonomy until 2046. However, the Central government appears to have another agenda – it tightens its grip gradually on HKSAR's political and judicial autonomy and freedom of press. The city's religious freedom has been shrinking progressively over recent years. The question is: how is HK's freedom of religion or belief trampled under the sovereignty of the communist regime?

China being an atheist and totalitarian state, its president Xi propagates the ideology of Marxism-Leninism (hostile towards religion), especially socialist values, and demands absolute loyalty to the communist party. Early warning signs of violations of freedom of religion or belief intensify. Indeed, Xi issued his manifest "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" for the party members, and Chinese and HK religious leaders to study. Likewise, he imposed the Patriotic Education Law in China and now in HK to "educate" students in socialist values. He developed Sinicization of religion and imposed the National Security Law first in China and then in HK to remove foreign influence on religion. Through these propagation activities, Xi attempts to "convert" Chinese and Hongkongers to believe in him and the Party instead of God/gods.

Therefore, in this paper, HK's religious demographics and its legal provisions will be first introduced. Then, the ideology of the communist party, notably the state's campaign of Sinicization of religion will be explained. Finally, the impact of HK's legal framework on freedom of religion or belief including self-censorship, as well as state control over the religious minorities and the education sector will be analyzed. The analysis will be supported by illustrations and incidents.

SMALL PAPERS SESSION 3 (Thu, 16:30-17:30) | Chair: Tatiana Kopaleishvili To the top ↑
ROOM A

"We have to love the people whom we serve!": Advice of a Turkish martyr to be for Christians witnessing to Turks – in comparison with recommendations of the "Lausanne Occasional Paper: Understanding Muslims" (Wolfgang Häde)

The Turkish convert from Islam and Christian pastor Necati Aydın was invited by the German mission agency „Orientdienst e.V." (Oriental Ministries) to speak at their "Turkish Outreach Conference" in Gernsheim, Germany, April 9-13, 2007, to an audience of Christians either active or at least interested in sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with Turkish and Kurdish immigrants in Europe.

Necati Aydin gave three talks in Turkish on three consecutive days of the conference. The title for the series of talks was "İnsanları Mesih için Kazanmak" ("To win people for Christ"). The talks were taped as mp3-files which I have access too.

A few days after his return to Turkey, Necati, his Turkish co-worker Uğur Yüksel and Tilmann Geske, a German missionary, were brutally killed by five young Turks in their office in Malatya. The reason for the murders was very clearly the three Christians´ efforts to share the Gospel with people in Malatya and the region.

I will evaluate Necati Aydın's talks that were never really researched. What happened to the then 35 years old Turkish Christian a few days later should draw our attention even more to what he chose to advice to Western Christians willing to share their faith with Turks and Kurds.

My observations then will be compared to recommendations for mission to Muslims in the "Lausanne Occasional Paper No 49: Understanding Muslims", which was produced by a working group at the 2004 Forum for World Evangelization in Pattaya, Thailand. My paper will draw attention to parallels and difference between the Turkish martyr to be and an official group statement of the evangelical world.

The Maccabees and the Freedom of Religion or Belief (Geert Lorein)

A historical study about the experience of a minority worldview in their larger political context and the different understandings of and reactions to this experience within that minority group can be illuminating to place modern situations and reactions in perspective.

This study is about the motives of the Maccabees (2nd century BC) in their conflict with the Hellenistic kings, in the first place with king Antiochus IV Epiphanes, but also in the days after his death. The Maccabees' motives are well documented, in several sources, which represent even some different viewpoints within the movement, shortly, enough material to inform us today.

The first phase that must be discussed is the reason why Antiochus IV started his repression. For which reason did he start an initiative against which he could expect some resistance? Some discussion has always existed about this issue, but the classical answer does not seem impossible in light of nowadays comparative material.

The second phase is the reaction of the Jews. It is obvious that an opposition between the two positions existed, but what exactly were the points that could not be accepted and the motives to pass to action? Moreover, specific kinds of action were undertaken, with different opinions within the group about the use of violence. Not only deep theological convictions, but also some characteristics and more practical considerations played their role. Although the main motives were overall the same, varieties in expression existed.

Are Hellenistic days parallel with our days? Partly. I hope that this historical comparative material will be illuminating. The earnestness of the Maccabees is the same earnestness we still meet today in matters of the Freedom of Religion or Belief.

SMALL PAPERS SESSION 3 (Thu, 16:30-17:30) | Chair: Archil Metreveli ROOM C

To the top ↑

Proselytism and Religious Symbols in Public Schools of Georgia (Archil Jangirashvili)

The Law of Georgia on "General Education" prohibits the use of the study process in general education institutions for religious indoctrination, proselytism, or forced assimilation, as well as the placement of religious symbols on school grounds for non-academic purposes. Despite these prohibitions, religious proselytism is not infrequent and placement of religious symbols for non-academic purposes is a widespread practice in Georgia's public schools. This practice puts the religious freedom of students (as well as their parents) at particular risk and challenges their religious equality and non-discrimination.

In some respects, the mentioned occasion is conditioned by the weakness of the legal definition of "proselytism" in the Georgian Legislation, which makes it difficult to identify and eliminate violations of the law. This issue (in general, beyond the Education System) is also challenging, especially when emerges a need for distinction between the Freedom of Manifestation of Religion (right to convert people) and the "Improper Proselytism".

The presented paper will describe the mentioned issues based on established ECtHR Case-Law (Kokkinakis v. Greece; Larissis and others v. Greece; Lautsi v. Italy; etc.) and in light of this general background, specific Georgian cases and legal mechanisms for responding to them will be discussed.

The Religious Believer in a Liberal Democracy's Public University and the Limiting Dimensions of Propagation and Conversion (Shaun de Freitas)

Challenges abound regarding the protection of the religious believer's freedom in liberal democracies. Religion is in many instances confined to the private sphere and the public sphere, is popularly viewed as sharing a common reason that is separate from and superior to, religion. Accompanying this is the widespread view that it is the propagation of only religious expressions, which have the potential to convert and even to proselytize. Bearing the above in mind, this paper illustrates the plight of the religious academic in the employ of a secular public university in a liberal democracy. In this regard, the religious scholar finds herself exposed to a context that is dominated by non-religious sentiment, and consequently exposed to forms of propagation that come into opposition to the religious academic's convictions. Such exposure results in forms of conversion (whether minor or major) that point away from the religious academic's foundational faith. Added to this, such an academic finds it very challenging to propagate her faith in the work environment, which also has implications regarding the religiously motivated calling to act as a witness of the faith to the world, and in so doing, leading others to the faith (conversion). In the scenario sketched above, the different and limiting dimensions of propagation and conversion are brought to the fore. Bearing the above in mind, a liberal democracy's proclaimed commitment towards the protection of fundamental rights (also those of minority groups) and of advancing diversity, is questioned. More importantly, this paper seeks solutions to the challenges presented in the aforementioned; solutions not aimed at what can be done from an institutional point of view but rather with the focus on the religious believer herself.

SMALL PAPERS SESSION 4 (Fri, 11:00-12:00) | Chair: Bernhard Reitsma ROOM A

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Baptism - then what? The relationship between motivation for conversion and consequent challenges for Arabic speaking converts in the German context (Heidi Josua)

The author has been working with Arabic Speakers in four Arabic Protestant Churches in Southern Germany for 35 years. During this time, there have been conversions and baptisms, especially in the years of the so-called refugee wave 2015-2017. In order to make these converts visible, she recorded their individual journeys to the Christian faith and what they expect from German churches.

Following on, a guide was planned for the pastoral care of Arabic speaking converts after their baptisms, considering converts from Morocco to Iraq. There are denominational differences, but they are mostly Protestant and now affiliated with the Arabic Evangelical Church in Stuttgart.

Looking back on each individual journey and the way it was accompanied over many years, sometimes decades, it became visible that the current situation is often related to the original motivation for conversion. This motivation seems to be a factor influencing what happens after baptism, whether this is healthy spiritual growth or the emergence of problems. So, this paper looks at the relationship between motives for conversion and subsequent challenges.

Until now, research has concentrated on motivation and processes of conversion, and the questions of identity and inculturation. Experience shows, that the personality of the convert and their needs within the process cannot be ignored. These may be reflected in problematic spiritual developments which can lead to leaving Christian fellowship altogether.

This paper is based on empirical research among church leadership, own experience and literature and takes into account the perspectives of those who have been baptised and also their spiritual leaders.

Apostasy from Islam and Baptism into Christianity (Duane Alexander Miller)

In the news today we hear of converts from Islam to Christianity requesting baptism. This paper will look into the complexities and contexts of some of these converts with a focus on Europe. Attention will be paid to the typical and legal implications of apostasy from Islam to another religion (or not religion at all). One aspect of the context that makes the issue especially complicated is that of the convert asking for asylum or refugee status. Drawing on research in North America, the UK, Turkey, Spain, Israel-Palestine, Jordan, and Tunisia, the author summaries what appear to be best practices for the ministers and clerics of congregations who are receiving these requests.

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Propagating hope – perspectives on hope and persecution (Petra Laagland-Winder)

In the Bad Urach statement, hope is named as one of the ways in which Christians can respond to situations of suffering because of religious persecution. In psychological research, hope is recognized as a robust source of resilience and meaning-making for individuals and communities in stressful circumstances. The concepts of agency and pathway play an important role here– one understands oneself as able to achieve a certain goal and have strategies to accomplish it. From a theological perspective, hope is perceived as grounded within God and his agency. Meaning-making is often linked to an eschatological perspective and is based on trust.

In this paper, based on an explorative study from my MA-thesis, I will discuss different and conflicting theological understandings of persecution and hope as distilled from interviews with four Christian-faith-based organizations supporting persecuted communities, and five leaders of persecuted communities. Secondly, I illustrate how one's understanding of persecution influences what one's hope is, what pathways one uses to realize this hope, and how one tries to raise levels of hope. Lastly, I will show which hope-building strategies can be considered helpful to sustain and strengthen Christian ecologies of hope.

From Μαρτυρία to Martyrdom: The Slippery Slope of the Semantic Shift (Yevgeny Ustinovich)

Many religions and ideologies have their martyrs – individuals willing to pay the ultimate price for their beliefs. Christian Church has always honoured its martyrs, and historically veneration of martyrs has taken various forms – not all of them equally healthy or appropriate. Contemporary Western Christianity is also greatly divided, among other things, over the attitudes toward religious persecution.

How did early Christians understand the concepts of witness/martyrdom developed in the New Testament? And how should contemporary Christians react to reports of violence against other followers of Jesus throughout the world? The former question is rather academic, whereas the latter one is very practical. The purpose of this presentation is to encourage an interdisciplinary discussion that may contribute to a better understanding of religiously motivated violence and ways to deal with it.

The first part of the paper contains some observations made with methodology from sociolinguistics and New Testament studies. It is shown that, while persecution was in the background of many New Testament texts, the concept of μαρτυρία underwent a significant change during the transition from the Jewish to the Gentile communities of faith. Some trajectories of that semantic shift may be traced in the later period of the Church history as well. Some connotations that were indispensable for the early Christians ceased to be obvious, while other, new ones developed and became deeply entrenched in the religious experience of Christendom.

The second part of the presentation involves a discussion on how understanding these primary and secondary connotations may lead to revision of priorities for those Christians who see ministering to the persecuted church as an integral part of their mission and lifestyle.

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The Insult to Religious Feelings vs. The Freedom of Expression in Georgian Legislation and Case-Law (Ketevan Gegiadze)

The Criminal Code of Georgia prohibits unlawful interference with the performance of divine service or other religious rites or customs using violence or threat of violence, or if accompanied by an insult to a believer's religious feelings. The reference to religious feelings in the law together with the right to worship in the identical context gives the impression that the protection of religious feelings, like the right to worship, is also part of the Freedom of Religion or Belief. Such an interpretation of religious feelings is contrary to different understanding, according to which the prohibition of insulting religious feelings is not a right protected by Freedom of Religion, but one of the legitimate aims of restricting the Freedom of Expression.

In addition to the challenging legal provision mentioned above, the frequent intention of Georgian legislators to criminalize "The Insult to Religious Feelings" is also problematic. In 2015 and 2018, draft laws were submitted to the Parliament of Georgia twice, which aimed to protect the religions, clerics, and believers from insulting. Although the Parliament of Georgia did not support the above-mentioned draft laws, this issue remains an active challenge in the Georgian legislative and academic space.

The given paper will represent the mentioned issues based on established ECtHR Case-Law (Otto-Preminger-Institute v Austria; ES v Austria; Ana Gachechiladze v. Georgia; etc.) and in light of this, the specific challenges in Georgian legislation (including mentioned draft law provisions) and the academic responses to them will be discussed.

Rights in Question: Interrogating India's Anti-Conversion Laws Amidst Historical Complexities and Human Rights Struggles (Shilpi Pandey)

This research paper addresses the conclusions drawn by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) regarding India's state-level anti-conversion laws where it concludes that "violate international human rights law's protections for the right to freedom of religion or belief." In doing so the paper explores the influence of the colonial and pre-colonial history of conversions in India on present-day legislation. The research question guiding this study is: *"How does the colonial and pre-colonial history of conversions in India shape the contemporary understanding and enactment of anti-conversion laws?"*
Examining the historical context of religious conversions in India, the paper analyzes the colonial and pre-colonial dynamics, seeking to uncover the factors that have historically influenced religious conversion practices. By investigating the motivations, patterns, and implications of conversions during different historical periods, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the roots of India's anti-conversion laws.
Critically assessing the conclusions of the USCIRF, the research paper examines whether these findings align with or diverge from the historical situatedness of religious conversions in India. The paper aims to elucidate the impact of historical factors on the formulation and enforcement of present-day anti-conversion laws, exploring the nuanced relationship between historical context and contemporary legislative frameworks.
In conclusion, this research contributes to a more profound comprehension of the implications of India's anti-conversion laws by bridging the gap between historical practices and current policies. By highlighting the intricate interplay between history and legislation, the study sheds light on the complexities surrounding religious freedom in India, emphasizing the importance of a contextualized understanding in evaluating and shaping present-day legal frameworks.

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Farsi-Speaking Converts form Islam to Christianity: Disengagement from their Evangelical Churches (Olga Penner)

Since the refugee crisis in 2015/16 the author has worked as a missionary among Farsi-speaking refugees (Iranian and Afghan) in the region of Mainz (Germany) and has witnessed a wave of conversions from Islam to the Christian faith among them. According to literature, movements to the Christian faith have taken place in Iran (Stadlbauer 2019), in the transit countries Turkey, India and Greece (Akcapar 2019, Calrson 2021), as well as in western arrival countries like Germany or Sweden (Öztürk 2022, Schirrmacher 2020). But now, some years later, church leaders and missionaries observe that some of these converts are no longer in the churches. No published study to date deals specifically with the topic of disengagement of Farsi-speaking converts to Christian faith. A research project is planned to investigate the main reasons for the phenomenon mentioned by disengaged Farsi-speaking converts. The selection of the interview partners will follow the following criteria: they have came to Germany not earlier than 2015; they currently live in Rheinland-Pfalz, Germany; and they converted to the Christian faith but have not participated in

their evangelical or protestant churches for at least six months. This paper will present the research proposal and initial insights form a pilot study.

Challenges of Western Theological Education in view of Oriental Christians with Muslim Background (Hanna Josua)

Through globalization, via internet, satellites and migration to the West, the Gospel made its way into the hearts of innumerable Muslim people, belonging to all social segments of the Arab countries. This spread is also facilitated by the negative Islamic performance against each other and because of the ongoing upheavals in the Arab-Muslim World. Many tribal structures have thus been dismantled. Neither religious authorities there, nor the churches in the West, were prepared, or even expected such an extent of defection of people from Islam to Christianity.

Thus, a genuine encounter of the churches with the Oriental new-believers necessitates an educational framework, with which the transmission of Christian theology can take place on a cognitive level, that is comprehensible to the manifold believers, who differ from each other and whose education differs from Western approaches. Therefore, there is a desperate need for an adequate theological education for Arabic-speaking Christians with Muslim background. This applies especially to leaders of numerous arising groups and congregations across Europe.

Western Churches and theological institutions are equipped to respond to challenges within their own context, due to identical schooling, language and culture. But until now, they prove to be obviously overstrained at this point with the education of the new believers. The reason is obvious. It is due to the new believers' oriental socialization, educational systems, cultural context and religious shaping.

Western theological curricula have so far not considered the above factors. They are not concerned with addressing the issues connected to the converts' socialization, which would be crucial to them. It is not a matter of prerogatives - converts from Islam in the West before cultural integration on the other hand usually do not demonstrate a sufficient understanding and reception of Western culture. They also need to at least attain a certain level of education in the West, besides the linguistic difficulties they have to face. Therefore, there is a need of a first generation of oriental theologians in the West, who can function as a bridge for the newcomers.

Therefore, a dedicated curriculum for converts from Islam should make it possible for them, to undergo an undergraduate theological education that opens the way for further education to create a new theological structure for migrants and that can also enrich Western theology.

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Embracing Liberated Liminality: A Comparative Evaluation of the Status and Role of Two BMB Churches in the Struggle for the Freedom of Thought, Conscience, and Religion in Iran and in Algeria Today (Patrick Brittenden and Parsa Zarin Ghalam – online)

This paper examines the status and role of two Muslim background believer churches in Iran and Algeria, focusing on their struggle for freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. In both countries, the indigenous churches navigate a dominant-subordinate dynamic within majority-Muslim contexts. The chapter examines the challenges faced by BMB communities, namely apostasy laws and societal perceptions, and explores BMBs potential transformative role. It proposes redefining these communities not as minorities but as entities with a unique identity and mission. Drawing on the concept of liminality, the chapter suggests the BMB churches occupy a margin from which they can emerge as liberated and liberating liminals, fostering greater transformations not only for themselves but also for broader religious landscapes in both countries.

Apostasy and Exclusion from a Social Identity Perspective (Jack Barentsen – online)

Apostasy is a challenging concept in contemporary society. Social identity theory is proposed as a lens to understand and interpret the identity dynamics of the concept, unraveling experiences that lead groups and individuals towards inclusion or exclusion. A social identity is a psychological sense of belonging to some groups and not others. It is thus always comparative and highly complex, as individuals negotiate their belonging to many different groups simultaneously, and as groups seek to distinguish themselves in their broader social environment.

Religious beliefs and practices are a significant element of many social identities. Apostasy, defined broadly as losing or changing religious identification, implies a crossing (transgression) of religious identity. A faith community may label an individual as apostate because of deviance from the group's beliefs, or individuals may distance themselves from their community which they believe to have left important elements of the faith. Thus, apostasy involves communal and personal perspectives in a complex relationship of inclusion and exclusion.

In more individualist societies, sacred 'apostasy' texts are read within a context of individual freedom of choice with little impact on overall social belonging. In more collectivist societies, these texts support firm, impermeable identity boundaries, making religious crossovers very costly.

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Strategies of Muslim missionaries (Selam Bruk)

Missionary Muslims have already won many young people of Christian descent to (Salafist) Islam through YouTube videos on the Internet. What makes the Salafist belief system so attractive and how should Christians respond to missionary Islam on the Internet? How do Salafist Muslims in Germany use religious freedom to promote their understanding of Islam?

In order to answer this question, the success factors of various preachers on YouTube were examined in 2012. This is the social media platform through which Muslim missionaries gained their publicity and whose freedoms they took advantage of.

Frequently mentioned arguments of Muslim preachers were examined. Particular attention is paid to the videos of convert Pierre Vogel and his arguments about Muhammad's prophecy and Jesus' divine sonship. He uses a variety of biblical texts to convince Christians of Islam.

The results of this comprehensive study help Christians to understand the background of the reasoning of missionary Muslims in order to be able to respond to them appropriately.

Digital Dissent: Decoding the Critical Discourse of Francophone Ex-Muslims on X (Phares Deborah)

Throughout history, apostasy and the critique of Islam have been viewed as heretical and, in some countries, punishable by imprisonment or death. Consequently, individuals renouncing their Islamic faith have often been compelled into clandestinity. A plethora of ex-Muslims, including figures like Ibn Warraq, Brother Rachid, Wafa Sultan, Hamed Abdel-Samad, Hela Ouardi, Magid Oukacha have shed light on this silencing. On the other hand, the advent of social media has witnessed a notable shift in the discursive habits of apostates in recent years. An increasing number openly declaring their apostasy and criticising Islam are visible on social networks (Mebroukine, C., & de Rauglaudre, T., 2019).

This research addresses the gap that exists in the literature: Until recently, studies on apostates have primarily focused on the reasons for their apostasy, their life trajectories, how they navigate within Muslim societies, the repercussions on their lives, as well as the process of conversion and deconversion (Khalil &

Bilici, 2007; Streib et al., 2009; Gooren, 2010; Simon Cottee, 2015; Azweed Mohamad et al., 2017; van Nieuwkerk, 2018; Maria Vliek, 2019, 2021). However, no research seems to have examined the critical discourse of ex-Muslims on social media platforms, from a mass communication perspective. As understood by Zienkowski (2018), critique becomes a tool for social, cultural, and political change, as it can help highlight injustices and provide a foundation for activism.
Building on a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis framework inspired by N. Fairclough, Kress and Van Leeuwen, this research also incorporates enunciative pragmatics and polyphony of discourse, aligning with Charaudeau's works. This methodological fusion enables an examination of the intricate layers within the discourse seeking to (1) understand their multimodal representations of Islam, (2) expose their argumentation, and (3) extract the underlying ideology behind their posts.

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Can Mission prevent Arrogance at all? A theological study (Matthias Adt)

Mission is a polarizing word. But astonishingly not a biblical word. Some people associate it with an ogre beating some unfortunate victim with a religious club. There are many examples of that in church history. Moreover, in the Western world today – in contrast to most other regions – religion is regarded as a private matter. To understand mission, one could and should choose a historical or sociological approach, but this paper emphasizes the life and conduct of Jesus (as documented in the common source of all denominations, the Bible) concerning the question whether a “touch” of arrogance is unavoidable in missionary activities.
In 2011 the ecumenical project “Christian witness in a multi-religious world” tried to summarize the biblical findings in this topic in an ethical code of conduct and has influenced the discussion until today. Many insights are still to be uncovered. Its main thesis will be presented.

The Church Amidst the War of Attrition: Ukrainian Evangelical Community in Search of a New Mission Paradigm (Roman Soloviy)

The presentation is a comprehensive analysis of the struggles and challenges faced by Ukrainian Evangelicals in the wake of the Russian aggression against Ukraine that took place between 2022 and 2024. This analysis focuses on how the ongoing war has impacted the church's overall mission and how it has adapted to a rapidly changing political and social environment. The author argues that with Ukrainian society experiencing significant social and existential challenges due to the ongoing war, the traditional model of mission work that solely focuses on evangelism and promoting Christian values as a counter to "neo-Marxist gender ideology" is gradually being replaced by a more holistic and inclusive approach to missionary theology and practice. This new approach emphasizes compassion, solidarity, social responsibility, and a prophetic vision for Ukrainian society after the war. Through this presentation, the author hopes to provide a deeper understanding of the evolving role and mission of the Ukrainian Evangelical Church and its potential impact on Ukrainian society in the post-war era.

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State Obstacles to Propagation: A Comparative View of France, Japan, and Taiwan (Panel with Rosita Šorité, Massimo Introvigne, Shane Brady, Liu Yin-Chun, Hsieh Hui-Yi, Eric Roux and Yvo Bruffaerts)

This session features a panel discussion contained in one hour (5 minutes for the presentation and 10 for the introduction; each panelist will be asked to speak for 7 minutes, followed by 10 minutes of Q&A). The topic is how propagation finds obstacles in state laws, regulations, and administrative action. In particular, the panel discussion will explore the amendments to the About-Picard law for combating "cultic deviances" in France, the post-Abe-assassination reports and actions against the Unification Church and the Jehovah's Witnesses in Japan and the new laws and regulations introduced there against "controversial religious organizations"; and the problems of taxes and transitional justice affecting certain religious and spiritual groups in Taiwan within the context following the 2024 elections.