

INTERVARSITY
URBANA15

The Challenge of Religious Freedom around the World

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Dilshad Garden, Delhi, India



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Some Patterns of Religious Persecution

- 1) Spearheaded by non-official groups, often as a means of increasing their notoriety.
- 2) Against “soft targets” – religious minority populations, rural poor, aimed at intimidating or ending “proselytizing”.
- 3) Tolerated justified, ignored, or privately sponsored by governments.

State Challenges to Religious Freedom



- Absolute Denial: relatively rare.
- Selective Use of Controls: common in Communist and some other authoritarian states.
- Religious establishment: normal in Muslim-majority countries.
- Efforts to defend the secular state: “laic” form of secularism increasingly common in Western states.

Societal Challenges to Religious Freedom

Four possible reasons:

- State Failure (no state exists).
- State Weakness (state cannot provide security).
- State Bows to Social Pressure.
- State Conspires with Social Forces.

Societal Challenges

- Militant groups
- Vigilantes
- Family disputes
- Sectarian politics



Why should we care?

Christians should be particularly concerned for religious freedom – b

Religious freedom is not just a “Christian” issue.

Religious freedom is an indivisible and universal concept and vital for the spread of the Truth.



What's New?

- Early Christians lived under constant threat to religious freedom.
- James even said to “count it pure joy”. Why?
- Because it could be our defining moment.
- Because it builds spiritual maturity.
- Because it gives us the opportunity to share in Christ's suffering.

“...we also rejoice in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. This hope will not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

Romans 5:3-5

Augustine on Religious Freedom

“The reliquaries of the martyrs and the churches of the apostles bear witness to this; for in the sack of the city they were open sanctuary for all who fled to them, whether Christian or Pagan. To their very threshold the blood-thirsty enemy raged; there his murderous fury owned a limit.”

City of God, Book One

The Christian calling to serve as salt and light may provide our best defence of religious freedom.

“seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

Jeremiah 29:7

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 12:17-21

A Story: Cairo's Moqattam Mountain



Three Questions for Reflection

- Do we see challenges to religious freedom as opportunities to show the power of Christ?
- Do we take Jesus's example seriously and love our enemies even as we seek justice from them?
- Do we love others as we love ourselves and stand up for their rights to religious freedom as jealously if not more jealously than our own?

Thank You!

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