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Call for inputs: Promotion of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief at the national and local level – GA report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

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Most analyses of Freedom of Religion or Belief focus on documenting religious freedom violations but give little attention to the responses of religious minorities to these violations. Without a doubt, more research is needed to help religious groups to be better prepared to face pressures. Against this background, the main objective of the project "Good practices to prevent religious discrimination" of the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) is to identify good practices of prevention and resolution of religious conflicts in different parts of the world that have proven effective and that can be turned into templates that can be adopted by other vulnerable religious groups. In other words, this project aims to document instruments and tactics that have served persecuted communities to avoid or redress persecution, evaluate their impact, and identify key learnings that can be replicated in other contexts.

Although the project is still in its early stages, we would like to provide the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief with some preliminary findings of our initiative, which can be used as input for the report on promotion of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief at the national and local level she is currently preparing. In this submission, we present data from pilot research on (1) the Training, Rehabilitation, and Empowerment model in Nigeria, (2) the Ambassadors for Peace Program in Iraq and Syria, (3) the Religious Freedom Public Policy of Colombia, and (4) the interreligious participatory mechanism on urban planning in the city of Manizales (Colombia). The annexes included in this submission provide further background on the project.

The Training, Rehabilitation, and Empowerment model in Nigeria

This private initiative was created by a Christian leader in Nigeria named Kenneth, the country lead for Peace Cord International who has been working in religious freedom since 2001. The involvement of this leader and his organization grew out of his own life experience. In 2001 the violent riots took place between Christians and Muslims. Mass killings and destruction in the city dramatically impacted the family business, leading to the displacement of families and rebuilding their homes from conditions of poverty. This experience led Kenneth to study peace building and get involved in religious freedom work.

As a Christian, Kenneth felt that religion had resources to contribute to peace despite the violence often done religion's name. This led him to a peacebuilding model that he has successfully implemented in several communities. The model focused on Training, Rehabilitation, and EMpowerment. This TREM model is a good practice that is seeing success. This model focused on young men and women, and it aims to build capacity, prevent conflict, and manage conflict in communities. In his context he was able to engage with critical issues like insecurity, drug abuse among young people, and extremism. In some religious communities, it can be difficult for women and youth to have a voice. A peer-oriented, horizontal approach fostered conversation among peer groups, which was a part of developing resiliency.

Kenneth used part of his TREM model within another project called the Joint Initiative for Strategic Religious Action (JISRA). It began in Nigeria and is being implemented in seven countries today. The project is intended to run through 2025. The project promoted FoRB and included Catholic, Islamic, Protestant, interreligious and secular consortium partners, and local partners. The project is focused on intra-religious, inter-religious, and extra-religious dynamics. The peace building needs to happen at multiple levels.

The first step begins with intrareligious discussion. The religious communities have internal discussions focused on the experiences, challenges, and issues they are facing. This may include Muslim leaders talking about issues in the Mosque or Christians discussing their concerns in churches. These intrafaith groups work through training materials and discuss challenges or communal difficulties in preparation to for the next step. The idea is that when a religious group understands hindrances in meeting their religious obligations and seeks to address it, they will be prepared to see that need in a different faith community. For example, as Muslims consider concrete issues of worship or burying their dead, they might be better prepared to see valid needs in a Christian community.

This step can go on for as long as it takes, but usually twelve months or less. During this time, the outside teams will do training on tolerance, trauma healing, relationship building, and conflict transformation. It is important to not move to the next step of interreligious discussion too soon. Each community should have an opportunity to thoroughly discuss their intrafaith distinctives and air their grievances before engaging a different faith community. Throughout this process, the facilitators will regularly ask if the specific faith community is ready to meet with the other. A readiness to meet is indicated by a willingness to look at internal faults. The community should also indicate a willingness to forgive, without denying real hurts or problems.

The interfaith groups then begin having dialogue about issues in the community and barriers to peace. Often this second step of knowing the other dramatically reduces conflict opportunities. There are theological red lines in Islam and Christianity that are known through both communities, so neither side is asked to deny their commitments. Instead, both communities have an opportunity to recognize that freedom of religion or belief can create common ground to work together on the third pillar, extra-religious dynamics.

In the context of Nigeria this may involve issues of security, the economy or education. Religious groups engage with civil society groups, legislators, and other stake holders. As they develop action plans together, Muslims and Christians face community problems together and build social cohesion.

The Ambassadors for Peace Program in Iraq and Syria

In the country of Iraq, a collection of actors worked to develop a program called Ambassadors for Peace. This program which ran for over ten years focused on reducing violence by engaging those involved. In these highly religious communities, many of the violent actors were motivated by defending their religion. By gathering together local religious leaders with genuine spiritual influence, those running the program convened gatherings to talk about safety and protecting the vulnerable. Through many discussions over time, community leaders drew on their religious traditions to publicly champion the need for peaceful ambassadors. This idea was regularly promoted through various religious events and celebrations. Through regular meetings, leaders of religious communities began to humanize those different than themselves through an empathic extension of their own desire for safety and to follow their religious convictions. By defining a good religious leader as someone who could also be a hero for peace, the program saw a statistical decline in violence by 42%.

The Religious Freedom Public Policy of Colombia

In 2018, the Government of Colombia approved the Integral Public Policy of Religious Freedom, which focuses on promoting interfaith dialogue and implementing local policies to assess the social impact of religious communities.

In collaboration with UNDP, the Colombian Ministry of the Interior realized a comprehensive review of the actions of religious groups that have a high, medium, or low multiplier effect on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As a result of this review, the Government created a Social Dialogue platform to address conflicts that hinder progress towards each goal of the 2030 Agenda. This initiative recognizes the Interfaith Sector as a key participant and builds upon multilateral relationships. For instance, in Colombia, a Social Dialogue forum has been formed between the Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Health and Social Protection, and Universities. The objective is to integrate the Interfaith Sector into the National Strategy for suicide prevention, thereby contributing to the improvement of indicator 3.4.2—Suicide mortality rate of the 2030 Agenda.

Additionally, the Government facilitated Social Dialogue exercises between the Interreligious Sector, the National Risk Management Unit, the Ministry of the Interior, the School of Military Engineers, and local Planning Secretariats. These initiatives aimed to enhance community preparedness for natural hazards with the support of the Interreligious Sector. They also involved the inclusion of religious leaders in local Disaster Risk Management Committees, contributing to the fulfillment of indicator 1.5.4—Proportion of local government adopting and implementing local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with national disaster risk reduction strategies.

The Ministry of the Interior collaborated with the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) to analyze and measure the Interreligious Sector's economic contributions within the National Accounts System. This intersectoral effort revealed that religious congregations and associations provided paid employment to 262,743 people. This finding implies that the Interfaith Sector is contributing to improving indicator 8.5.2—Unemployment rate, disaggregated by gender, age, and persons with disabilities, as well as indicator 8.5.1—Average hourly income of employees, disaggregated by occupation, age, and persons with disabilities.

Furthermore, the study conducted by the Ministry of the Interior demonstrated that the sector also engages 1,760,378 individuals in volunteer work. Considering that volunteering plays a crucial role in achieving peace and development, as recognized by the United Nations' Resolution 10/129 "Integrating volunteerism for peace and development: action plan for the next decade and beyond" in 2015, the inclusion of this activity is highly significant.

Moreover, the government's research revealed that in 2020, the Interfaith Sector generated a substantial added value of over 1.2 billion Colombian pesos (219 million USD), demonstrating its contribution not only through social and educational initiatives but also to the country's economic growth. During the pandemic, the Interreligious Sector in Colombia provided humanitarian aid and mental health care, amounting to a value close to 350 billion pesos (76 million USD), according to the findings by UNDP-MININTERIOR (2022).

The interreligious participatory mechanism on urban planning in the city of Manizales (Colombia)

Between 2017 and 2019, the Interreligious Dialogue for Urbanism (INDIUR) was established in the city of Manizales (Colombia) as a mechanism to ensure freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in urban planning. Manizales is home to 65 religious groups, including Buddhists, Christians, and Hindus, among others.

During the dialogue process, the participants expressed their desire for a mechanism that would include representatives from various religious entities. This mechanism would have the ability to influence local government decisions regarding places of worship based on the unique perspectives of each religious group. The local authority chose to employ the Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology, which combines qualitative study with actionable measures. Through

collective actions, participation itself becomes the research activity, transforming participants from research subjects into active researchers.

Religious entities were represented by their leaders in this exercise. Various techniques were applied over a span of two years. Initially, a preliminary survey was conducted to identify the concerns most strongly expressed by religious leaders. These concerns included issues related to safety and inadequate lighting around their places of worship, insufficient road signage leading to an increased risk of accidents, external noise affecting their services, lack of parking areas, interruptions caused by traffic authorities during worship times, physical damage to their places of worship, high rental costs, and exposure to natural hazards like landslides and fires. These situations highlight the close connection between security and FoRB in urban spaces.

It was also discovered that the municipal government had identified only 72 places of worship, whereas in reality, there were over 180. Consequently, urban planners were making decisions based on knowledge of less than half of the existing places. A social mapping exercise was carried out in collaboration with religious leaders who have places of worship in the city's 11 districts. During this exercise, the leaders marked the locations of their places of worship on a map, along with nearby schools, transportation routes, business districts, areas of poor security, and any other significant features. This helped gain insight into the functioning of religious entities within their communities.

One of the noteworthy observations was that places of worship serve as hubs of social cohesion. These places are interconnected with their surroundings, coexisting with commercial establishments, residences, schools, and places of worship belonging to other religious organizations. It was evident that religious leaders aim to make their places of worship visible within their local communities and prefer locations in densely populated areas. Therefore, any

urban planning activity that hinders the establishment of places of worship in these spaces would disregard these characteristics, interests, and self-perceptions.

This analysis highlights the significance of creating dialogue processes at the local level to give visibility to the needs and conditions of different religious communities. Urban planning is just one aspect among various circumstances where religious freedom can be influenced. Please find attached a detailed report on the experience in Manizales, which demonstrates that if urban planning decisions fail to consider these religious beliefs, they can inadvertently violate FoRB through these urban choices.

Conclusions

Practices observed from pilot research on good practices from other case studies include:

- Mobilizing business and the economic sector to unite communities together. The Business and Religious Freedom Foundation highlighted how the Sunshine nut company is hiring workers from North and South in Mozambique and investing profits into local communities.
- Working with multiple organizations and governments to advocate from the outside in, in difficult contexts like Vietnam.
- Developing a program like Ambassadors for Peace in Iraq and Syria, by building intentional connections with Muslim leaders to reduce active conflict. This program reportedly reduced violence by 42%.
- Starting a peace foundation and focusing on research in Nigeria. Creating well informed reports that avoid sensationalism helps policy makers and parliamentarians face the reality on the ground and increase accountability.

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Good practices to reduce, resolve, and prevent religious conflict

Kyle Wisdom

This project was inspired by the clear needs which surfaced through research. One clear example comes from an article published in the *International Journal for Religious Freedom* (IJRF). In Petri's article, "Resilience to Persecution: A Practical and Methodological Investigation" (2017), he surveys research done on religious communities and their response to persecution. He proposes a resilience assessment tool to categorize how vulnerable communities respond to persecution, then uses empirical research in three Latin American contexts to illustrate the importance of helping vulnerable populations. In the conclusion he states:

> As Stout (2010) argues, grassroots religious groups, if they adopt effective strategies, can exercise real influence over policy and promote social justice. Compiling a manual of best practices of the application of coping mechanisms, similar to Gene Sharp's (1993) catalogue of 198 'methods of nonviolent action,' could also serve a didactic purpose (Petri 2017:82).

Petri's understanding of coping mechanisms draws on several previous studies, two of which present broader categories for understanding and analyzing responses to conflict. The first is the book *Under Caesar's sword*, which groups Christian responses to persecution in categories of "survival, association, and confrontation" (Philpott and Shah 2018:11). The second study uses a human security lens. Glasius focuses on citizen's own survival responses to violent conflict through categories of "avoidance, compliance, collective action, and taking up arms" (2012). These categories are indeed helpful places to begin, but additional work is needed to compile best practices in the spirit of what Petri has proposed.

This is the gap this project seeks to fill. We have used the term "good practices" instead of "best practices" as this acknowledges the complicated problem we are addressing, in alignment with the Cnyefin framework. The name change avoids universalizing any specific practice as fitting for any context and acknowledges the reality that responding to the problem of conflict requires a range of responses.

Researchers and actors in the field of religious studies have access to many streams of information from a plethora of perspectives. Studies of conflict, their

sources and contributing factors should and will continue. However, this project aims to investigate practices that help prevent, de-escalate, or resolve conflict. This inevitably involves building resiliency, local and foreign actors, and multiple domains of society working together.

This research endeavor follows a case study approach. Rooted in studies on religious freedom, it generates and collects information on good practices for mitigating conflict that involves religion. The researcher has interviewed individuals and organizations in diverse regional contexts with known pressure against religious communities. This is a first step in an ongoing process of compiling good practices. This initial report follows pilot research in: Vietnam, Iraq, Nigeria, Colombia, and Mozambique. The case studies aim to generate descriptions of practices that might be replicated and adapted in different contexts to promote the religious freedom.

Good practices noted from pilot research include:

- Mobilizing business and the economic sector to unite communities together. The Business and Religious Freedom Foundation highlighted how the Sunshine nut company is hiring workers from North and South in Mozambique and investing profits into local communities.
- Working with multiple organizations and governments to advocate from the outside in, in difficult contexts like Vietnam.
- Developing a program like Ambassadors for Peace in Iraq and Syria, by building intentional connections with Muslim leaders to reduce active conflict. This program reportedly reduced violence by 42 percent.
- Starting a peace foundation and focusing on research in Nigeria. Creating well informed reports that avoid sensationalism helps policy makers and parliamentarians face the reality on the ground and increase accountability.

This project is still in its infancy and has several avenues for expansion. We plan to write up case studies based on interviews already conducted in phase one and re-evaluate the plan for the next phase. If you have a case you feel would be a valuable addition please contact Dr Kyle Wisdom: kwisdom@iirf.global.

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Resilience to persecution

A practical and methodological investigation

Dennis P. Petri[1]

Abstract

Religious minorities should not only be viewed as passive victims of persecution; they also have agency and can develop mechanisms to cope with the human security threats they face. This study proposes a novel categorization of the broad array of coping mechanisms religious minorities have at their disposal and develops a "Resilience Assessment Tool" as an instrument to observe the resilience of religious minorities. This categorization is then illustrated by discussing three Latin American cases based on original field research. Finally, a number of implications of these empirical findings are formulated for religious minorities and faith-based organizations.

Keywords Resilience, vulnerability, coping mechanisms, religious freedom, Cuba, Colombia, Mexico.

1. Introduction

To offset the victimization of religious minorities as a result of persecution, in this study I discuss the concept of resilience, based on the premise that religious minorities have agency and can develop mechanisms to cope with the human security threats they face. Persecution cannot always be avoided, but religious minorities can certainly respond proactively to it. First, I discuss the broad array of coping mechanisms religious minorities have at their disposal, proposing a novel theoretical framework in which I distinguish between eight categories of coping mechanisms: avoidance, spiritual endurance, compliance, social wisdom, moral standing, solidarity, collective action and taking up arms. Based on this categorization, I develop a Resilience Assessment Tool as an instrument to describe the resilience of religious minorities. I then illustrate my tool by using empirical elements from three Latin American cases where I conducted original field research. I conclude by formulating a number of implications of my empirical findings for religious minorities and faith-based organizations.

[1] Dennis P. Petri is scholar-at-large at the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America, lecturer at The Hague University of Applied Sciences and the Universidad Latinoamericana de Ciencia y Tecnología, and director of the Foundation Platform for Social Transformation (www.platformforsocialtransformation.org). This article is taken from sections of his PhD dissertation, The Specific Vulnerability of Religious Minorities (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2020). This article uses American English. Article submitted: 5 June 2020; article accepted: 16 November 2020. Email: dp.petri@gmail.com.

2. The Resilience Assessment Tool

How can vulnerable religious minorities develop coping mechanisms and become resilient?[2] *Under Caesar's Sword* highlights three typical strategies Christian communities adopt to respond to persecution: "survival, association and confrontation" (Philpott and Shah 2018). These three strategies are not mutually exclusive but can overlap to a great extent. Survival refers to the range of creative strategies of preservation of life that can be applied while staying true to essential elements of church life, often in secret. Association is the active strategy of building networks, such as interdenominational partnerships, interreligious dialogue and international cooperation, to stand stronger against external threats. Confrontation is the often-risky strategy of openly challenging the persecution.

Within a human security framework, Glasius proposes four types of survival strategies people adopt when confronted with violent conflict: (a) avoidance, (b) compliance, (c) collective action and (d) taking up arms (2012:9-16). Avoidance comprises fleeing but can also include refraining from making statements that could be considered as 'politically deviant'. Compliance refers to the obedience to the demands of armed parties – this can be expanded to any actor causing human security threats – including forced labor, the payment of charges or bribes, giving information, betraying others, or even sexual services. Collective action includes not only resistance but also other forms of collective resilience such as information sharing, the preservation of community facilities, informal gatherings or collective negotiation. Taking up arms refers to the direct confrontation of armed power, for example through the creation of self-defense militias.

These four types of survival strategies can take different forms when applied to religious minorities. In *Blessed Are the Organized*, Jeffrey Stout analyzes ways in which religious communities in the United States combat social injustice through organized collective action (2010). An illustration of the avoidance strategy is the 'internal exit movement' that formed under the East German dictatorship before the fall of the Berlin Wall, which was essentially composed of people, including Christians, who mentally withdrew from the regime and gathered in churches, private flats and reading clubs as private acts of protest (Grix 2000:93).

In a way, the avoidance and compliance strategies can be viewed as the opposites of the collective action strategy, although it is possible for people to engage in both strategies at different moments in time. Avoidance (or compliance) can be the result of fear or of a feeling that resistance is useless in given contexts, but it can also be the result of theological options that do not value any form of social engagement or collective action (Freston 2001, 2008; Petri 2012).

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[2] In this article, I use the concepts of coping mechanisms and resilience interchangeably.

Indeed, when we consider the role of religion in inspiring social engagement, two theological alternatives are possible: one that inscribes itself in a tradition of isolation and sometimes even rejection from the world, and one that connects with traditions of social engagement and an active role in civil society (Buijs, Dekker and Hooghe 2009; Philpott and Shah 2018). The differences between the two religious traditions are particularly visible in the Protestant world, in which the Anabaptist tradition views the church as a "contrasting community", an alternative to society with an inner focus, whereas the Calvinist tradition calls for an active contribution to social transformation through participation in social initiatives and the denunciation of social injustice (Kennedy 2009; Hunter 2010). The active theological option can in turn be divided between a conservative and a transformative approach to society.

Whereas collective action is essentially nonviolent, taking up arms can be considered an extreme, violent form of collective action. Again, the engagement of religious people in armed resistance is determined to a large extent by their theological preferences, i.e., whether they adhere to pacifist traditions or, on the contrary, follow more militant religious teachings (Wellman 2012). In the Christian tradition, for example, the long tradition of just war theory, which developed with Augustine, coexists with ever-present pacifist traditions. Taking up arms, including counterinsurgency, is not necessarily morally wrong when it serves the purpose of enforcing human security, provided that it follows certain principles regarding the use of force (Salmon and Kaldor 2006; Glasius 2008).

Glasius's categorization of coping mechanisms can be expanded by some additional categories of coping mechanisms that are specific to religion. The first element of religion that comes to mind is the spiritual endurance it provides, as religion is often a source of increased self-awareness, moral strength, and hope in difficult times for its adherents. This is also the central point of Boyd-MacMillan's *Faith That Endures* (2006). Spiritual endurance is essentially an internal feature. It is not limited to religious people, but actively religious people would have this trait almost by default.

In many religious traditions, vulnerability is viewed as something positive or beneficial, as a good attitude to have, and even as a virtue, indeed a source of resilience. A biblical concept close to vulnerability is *praus* (Greek), which can be translated as mildness, gentleness, or meekness, and is viewed as a virtue (a "fruit of the spirit"). In connection with this theme, a theology of suffering has developed, highlighting the benefits of suffering and persecution because of its purifying effect (Lewis (2002 [1940], 2002 [1961]); Boyd-MacMillan 2006; Harries 2016).

Beyond Christianity, vulnerability is valued in other religions. For example, in Judaism, vulnerability is considered as something that "can lead you toward connecting to something greater than yourself, connecting to others and to the divine," leading to resilience or *chosen* in Hebrew, understood as "to be inoculated, impermeable"

(Mandell 2016). In Buddhism, the notion of *karuna*, which is generally translated as compassion, refers to "the wish that all beings are relieved of suffering" which is a direct result of the awareness of the interdependence of everything in nature. It follows that the vulnerable deserve special protection (Hongladarom 2011).

Many works of literature and fiction highlight that vulnerability and suffering, however difficult it may be, leads to character development, new insights, and a deeper understanding of the world and is key to realizing the human good. Examples hereof are the novels *The Power and The Glory* by Graham Greene (2010 [1940]), *Silence* by Shūsaku Endō (1966), and *Till We Have Faces* by C. S. Lewis (1956) as well as the film *The Mission* (1986). It is also a central theme in the work of Greek tragic playwrights, as described in Nussbaum's *Fragility* (1986), and in the novels by Fyodor Dostoevsky (2018 [1866]). In social psychology, vulnerability is often presented as a key quality of a successful, creative, innovative and resilient leader. Brené Brown's TED talk, "The Power of Vulnerability," which had over 35 million views, brought this theme to the core of leadership studies. Brown's book *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (2012) develops the same theme.

The acknowledgment of the 'blessings in disguise' of vulnerability and suffering has an important downside, because it gives the perpetrators of attacks against religious groups the ability to justify their violence by alleging that the victims chose to be vulnerable. Nietzsche follows a similar line of thinking. In *The Anti-Christ* (1999 [1895]), he argues that religion, in particular Christianity which he refers to as "the religion of pity," increases vulnerability: "Pity stands opposed to the tonic emotions which heighten our vitality: it has a depressing effect. We are deprived of strength when we feel pity. That loss of strength which suffering as such inflicts on life is still further increased and multiplied by pity. Pity makes suffering contagious" (172-73). This is, of course, a fallacy, because acknowledging the purifying effect of suffering does not mean that one voluntarily embraces suffering itself or even that suffering is a choice.

Religion itself can also be a source of resilience, however. In *On Human Nature*, Roger Scruton suggests that religion provides increased self-awareness. He contends that religious people have a practical advantage over non-religious people, in that they have "a ready supply of stories and doctrines that make sense of those truths [pertaining to the human condition]" (2017: 46). The Christian tradition, for example, provides a narrative that explains the origin of evil (in Genesis) and the eschatological foretelling that Jesus' followers would suffer tribulations (John 15:18-16:33).

Another type of coping mechanism related to religion can be the moral standing of religious people in society, such as the respect that religious ministers com-

mand or the superstitious belief that religious people benefit from supernatural protection. Furthermore, because religious groups gather in communities, solidarity among members of a religious community can also be a coping mechanism. An example of solidarity is the sharing of humanitarian supplies to mitigate the impact of human security threats. In a study of the rescue of Jews in the Netherlands during the Holocaust, Braun (2016) demonstrates that religious minorities (Protestants in dominantly Catholic regions and Catholics in dominantly Protestant regions) are generally more inclined and better able to help other threatened minorities. In a way, this finding connects with Butler's (2016) argument that vulnerability is an important resource for resistance: being a vulnerable religious minority encourages and enables people to reach out to help other minorities. (This does not mean, however, that religious people are by default drawn to engage injustice, or that non-religious people are never drawn to do so.)

I use the word 'solidarity' to refer to support systems that exist within religious communities. I use the concept 'collective action' to refer to the engagement in political advocacy by members of a religious minority. Both solidarity and collective action can transcend the religious minority in question, as Hannah Arendt stresses in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (2006 [1963]), where she discusses how non-Jews could have spoken out on behalf of the Jews during World War II.

A final type of coping mechanism related to religion is Jürgen Habermas's (2006) interpretation of John Rawls's concept of "the use of public reason", which I refer to as social wisdom. Habermas argues, among other things, that both religious and secular citizens need to recognize that they live in a plural context (a post-secular society), and that in the public sphere they need to be willing to listen to and learn from each other's arguments. Earlier, Nicholas Wolterstorff had insisted that every citizen has a right to express his or her own views, using the vocabulary of one's preference, as long as normal decency standards are observed (Audi and Wolterstorff 1997; Buijs, Sunier and Versteeg 2013). Such an attitude, which Rawls has referred to as a "duty of civility," requires of citizens to be capable of "self-reflection" and to make "an effort to learn and adapt" as part of "an ethics of citizenship" that avoids misunderstanding and resentment. Social wisdom thus presupposes such notions as tolerance, respect, fairmindedness and prudence.

Although Habermas (2006) is concerned with the issue of religious expression in the public sphere and not with resilience, social wisdom can be viewed as a coping mechanism. Indeed, religious minorities can decrease their vulnerability by avoiding words and actions that could be perceived as provocative (Casanova 2008; Philpott and Shah 2018). In missiology, concepts such as 'contextualization' and 'cultural sensitivity' stress this exact point (Engle 1983). The theological ap-

propriation of Max Weber's distinction between *Gesinnungsethik* (ethics of conviction) and *Verantwortungsethik* (ethics of responsibility) by Helmut Thielicke, a Christian ethicist held in high regard among the more conservative and evangelical branches of Christianity, is also applicable here. The former concerns the noble ideals and convictions that one desires to realize; the latter considers what the possible negative consequences of those convictions and ideals could be (Thielicke 1969:512-15). As Buijs puts it, "one is enjoined to act concretely, wisely, in a limited manner; not to change the world, but to take one step, in line with concrete commandments (that includes the commandment not to kill)" (2013:34). (Considering social wisdom as a coping mechanism, an interesting question about the story of the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr [Acts 6:8-8:11], is whether he could have avoided his death had he refrained from insulting the Sanhedrin.)

Of course, social wisdom is no guarantee that religious minorities will be safe from threats. Depending on the circumstances, a seemingly inoffensive act can by perceived as a provocation. This was the case of Ahok, former governor of Jakarta, Indonesia, who quoted the Quran in a positive sense but was subsequently accused of blasphemy because he was a Christian (*Al Jazeera* 2017). Moreover, the lack of social wisdom can never be an excuse to cause harm to others. Religious minorities certainly have a responsibility to avoid unnecessary provocations, but a lack of self-reflection can never be used as a justification for human rights abuses committed against them.

Figure 1 synthesizes how I propose to order the coping mechanisms. The distinction between these categories is not watertight, as they can overlap, and religious minorities can engage in different strategies at the same time or at different moments, as alternative or complementary strategies. Albert O. Hirschman's (1970) classic threefold categorization of exit, voice, and loyalty as "responses to decline in firms, organizations and states" or "recuperation mechanisms" could be adapted as an ordering principle of these coping mechanisms. In the framework of this study, I retain the categories of exit and voice, but I substitute loyalty, which Hirschman strongly connects with the private or family spheres, by caution, which is more applicable to human security contexts. Exit covers avoidance strategies, including flight, internal exit (spiritual endurance), and the evasion of any kind of interaction with the powers that be. Compliance is clearly a caution response, involving tacit acceptance of the human security situation and obedience to any requirements made by the powers that be, and so is social wisdom. Moral standing, solidarity, collective action, and taking up arms are all distinct types of voice responses.

Before moving to the empirical section of this study, I would like to observe that my categorization of coping mechanisms should not be taken as a prescriptive list. Rather, I seek to provide a framework enabling the observation of coping mechanisms that religious groups do or could use, without making a normative statement about

Responses to human security threats	Coping mechanisms	Definition
Exit	Avoidance	Not interacting with the actors responsible for the human security threats, leading to flight or internal exit in the most extreme case.
	Spiritual endurance	Withdrawal within oneself, seeking comfort in personal religious beliefs.
Caution	Compliance	Obedience to any requirements presented by the actors responsible for the human security threats.
	Social wisdom	The ability, based on self-reflection, to anticipate how one's words and actions might be received in order to avoid being perceived as provocative.
Voice	Moral standing	Credibility with people outside the religious minority as a result of the respect given to religious roles or religious beliefs (moral authority).
	Solidarity	Mitigation of the humanitarian impact of human security threats within a religious community.
	Collective action	Engagement in advocacy or any form of (organized) nonviolent resistance or protest to the actors responsible for the human security threats.
	Taking up arms	Direct confrontation of armed power through the creation of self-defense militias or counter-insurgency units.

Figure 1. Categorization of coping mechanisms of religious minorities

how or whether they should use them. From a New Testament perspective, taking up arms is obviously problematic (cf. Jesus' rebuke of Peter when he wanted to prevent him from being arrested in Luke 22:49-51), although the Anabaptist/pacifist and Reformed perspectives give very nuanced interpretations of the use of physical force in different contexts. Moreover, in spite of their differences, these perspectives would be in agreement that social wisdom, which I also identified as a coping mechanism, is probably the most important element in decisions on how to use coping mechanisms.

3. Illustrations using Latin American cases

Since 2010, I have conducted field research in three Latin American contexts: (1) actively practicing Christians in the states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, and San Luis Potosí, Mexico, (2) cultural dissidents among the Nasa ethnic group in the *resguar-*

dos indígenas (indigenous reserves) of the southwestern highlands of Colombia, and (3) Christians in Cuba. After briefly introducing my cases, which correspond to very different sources of persecution and political-institutional contexts, I summarize and compare the anecdotal evidence of the coping mechanisms of these Christian groups.

Because this study is primarily a practical and methodological exploration, I use my empirical material merely as an illustration of my tool. A detailed description of the fieldwork I conducted can be found in my dissertation (Petri 2020). In this article, I present only some of the results of my interviews pertaining to the resilience of the religious minorities I surveyed, which mainly serve to illustrate the categorization of coping mechanisms I presented above. I do not engage with the literature about religious persecution in these countries, because, to my knowledge, no sources discuss responses to persecution, which is the topic of this article.

My first case concerns actively practicing Christians who have suffered human rights abuses at the hands of organized crime in three states of northwest Mexico. The time frame for this case study covers the second half of President Felipe de Jesús Calderón Hinojosa's term (2009-2012) and the first half of President Enrique Peña Nieto's term (2012-2015), during the height of the Los Zetas ("the Z's") insurgency. Los Zetas was the dominant drug cartel in northeast Mexico at the time of my research. Because Los Zetas and other criminal groups seek to preserve their interests, their activity is not threatened by people who simply declare their Christian identity. However, people involved in organized crime view Christians who openly oppose their activities as a threat, especially when Christians become involved in youth work, drug rehabilitation programs, or human rights initiatives.

My second case corresponds to an intra-ethnic (minority within a minority) conflict. I studied converts from the majority religion in an indigenous context, to whom I refer as 'cultural dissidents' among the Nasa ethnic group living in the southwestern highlands of Colombia (Cauca and neighboring departments). I chose to identify this minority as cultural dissidents, because they include Christians who, often after a conversion experience, decide to reject some tenets of the cultural and religious traditions of their community, but expressly declare that they continue to identify as Nasa and as indigenous. Their dissent focuses almost exclusively on aspects of Nasa culture that they disagree with, but they effectively maintain the same holistic worldview that characterizes their community and do not reject other elements of their indigenous heritage. The timeframe for this case study overlaps with the first six years of the administration of President Juan Manuel Santos Calderón (2010-2016), roughly until the signing of the peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

My third case considers all Christians in Cuba, with special attention to the most active Christians. Unlike the previous two case studies, I do not focus on a subnational area, mainly because there are no noteworthy geographical differences

within Cuba, although some human security threats, such as the intensity of surveillance and administrative restrictions, are reportedly higher in the eastern half of Cuba. The time frame for this case study begins in 2011, after Fidel Castro resigned as First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, and ends in 2018 when Raúl Castro stepped down as President of Cuba.

3.1 Actively practicing Christians in the states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, and San Luis Potosí, Mexico

Civic participation can be effective and instrumental in increasing the resilience of actively practicing Christians in northeast Mexico. In many cases, however, civic participation by actively practicing Christians also increases their vulnerability, especially when it threatens the operations of organized crime. Moreover, reducing human security risks is not really on the agenda of actively practicing Christians; none of the interviewees for this case study spoke about strategies devised by churches or Christian institutions to cope with the threats they face. Indeed, apart from some exceptions such as the positive involvement of Christian leaders in the police department of Guadalupe or the security protocol issued by the Mexican Catholic Church, there is no noteworthy reflection or self-awareness among Christian leaders as to how the threats posed by organized crime could be mitigated. Most interviewees seemed to have accepted the violence as normal and did not seem to be conscious of the specific restrictions it places on their religious freedom.

The lack of reflection on coping mechanisms is a missed opportunity in my view, because actively practicing Christians, if organized and united, can contribute their knowledge and experience to combat impunity and corruption. Often, the focus of most Christian leaders is restricted to church-related issues, leaving aside the potential contribution churches could make to national debates on the major issues affecting society, including the pervasiveness of organized crime.

3.2 Cultural dissidents among the Nasa ethnic group in the *resguardos indígenas* of the southwestern highlands of Colombia

At first sight, when one observes the social and political activism of the cultural dissidents among the Nasa ethnic group in Colombia, it might seem that their coping mechanisms are quite developed: they actively denounce the numerous injustices committed against them. However, as I discuss in my dissertation (Petri 2020), they have at times taken positions that have tended to polarize rather than develop common ground. In this case, activism increases the vulnerability of this religious minority. The spiritual endurance of the cultural dissidents is perhaps their greatest coping mechanism, but it turns into a pitfall when it is combined with an at times unnecessarily confrontational attitude.

The sense of belonging (loyalty) to the Nasa ethnic group of the cultural dissidents, makes Hirschman's (1970) category of voice their primary means of expressing dissent. This does not mean, however, that the ways in which the cultural dissidents express voice are effective. Voice is certainly used with great determination, but not with great creativity or resourcefulness, let alone social wisdom.

3.3 Christians in Cuba

Although there is certainly room for improvement, a great number of the threats to which Christians are subjected in Cuba are mitigated by the various coping mechanisms they routinely use. In particular, their clever avoidance strategies, spiritual endurance and exceptional solidarity, which have developed over the course of several decades, are all inspired by much social wisdom and are important sources of resilience of Cuban Christians.

Of course, there is a clear difference between the more active Christian individuals and groups and those who deliberately steer clear from any form of activism. Moreover, avoidance in the form of leaving the country continues to be very frequent, especially among those people who previously have been very outspoken in their missionary and human rights activism, but who eventually reach a point where they can no longer cope with the ubiquitous discouragement and harassment. The various voice strategies are thus neutralized by the fact that exit is always an option, at least theoretically. Advocacy, as a form of collective action, is gaining some traction but continues to be the effort of a lonely few, which inevitably decreases its effectiveness.

Finally, moral standing, solidarity in the form of humanitarian work or education, and very visible forms of collective action, although they can be thought of as sources of resilience, can work against actively practicing Christians. The exposure that comes with these mechanisms can transform a coping mechanism into a source of additional vulnerability. The same is true for engagement in social work, which can cause conflict with the ideological position of the communist state concerning private initiatives.

3.4 Comparison of the case studies

Most of my interviewees seemed to have little awareness of how they could equip themselves against human security threats. The reasons for this lack of awareness ranged widely, including adherence to pietistic theological options that discourage any involvement in society (in all cases), fear (northeast Mexico and Cuba), the acceptance ('normalization') of violence (in northeast Mexico) and the internalization of a restrictive definition of religious freedom as imposed by the regime (Cuba). Braun's (2016) finding that religious minorities are more inclined to help other vulnerable religious minorities or themselves seems only partly applicable

to my case studies. The cultural dissidents in the Nasa *resguardos*, by contrast, are very militant, but this stance has actually increased the threats they have faced.

Possibly because of the low level of awareness of the need to reflect on the development of resilience, social wisdom is also underdeveloped, with the notable exception of Cuban Christians, who have learned to be cautious so as to survive within the system. The few outliers in Cuba who adopt a more militant path are criticized by their peers for not having any actual impact. In the Nasa *resguardos*, notwithstanding the warnings of a select few, most cultural dissidents are convinced that they act in obedience to their faith and are willing to suffer the consequences. In northeast Mexico, the drug cartels are rarely confronted by actively practicing Christians, who often prefer to take refuge in avoidance and compliance strategies. In such a context, fear, not social wisdom, prevents actively practicing Christians from openly confronting the drug cartels, but it also implies that other coping mechanisms, such as the establishment of early warning networks or the engagement of private security to at least mitigate some of the risks, are rarely considered.

At the same time, coping mechanisms were by no means absent in my case studies. Avoidance and compliance, including formal compliance with government regulations while disrespecting their spirit, are common in Cuba. Cuban Christians and Nasa cultural dissidents both benefit from international support, which also translates into the implementation of solidarity mechanisms to mitigate some threats; this is largely absent for actively practicing Christians in northeast Mexico.

The relation between religion and resilience is unquestionably complex and multifaceted. Many people are attracted to a religion because of the expectation that it can provide some sort of relief from the hardships of the world. My case studies confirmed that religious convictions can at times be a source of resilience, because they help people make sense of difficult situations and offer hope and because religious communities can also provide solidarity. In all three cases, there are situations where spiritual endurance and moral authority command some respect that can serve to mitigate threats.

Collective action exists in all cases, but it is understandably difficult to use this coping mechanism in the face of severe human security threats and paralyzing fear. Its impact is also limited when it is not combined with social wisdom. The discreet advocacy work by Cuban Christians and the collaboration between Christian leaders and the police department in Guadalupe, Mexico are positive exceptions.

Collective action can be a double-edged sword. Sometimes, the very initiatives that religious minorities undertake to defend themselves lead to increased vulnerability. For example, the creation of solidarity networks or the establishment of advocacy initiatives, which are initially designed to mitigate threats, can have the opposite effect of drawing attention to a religious minority, thereby increasing its vulnerability.

This evidently happened in the Nasa *resguardos*, where political advocacy was initially conceived as an instrument to combat several forms of injustice but actually increased them. In northeast Mexico, initiatives to mitigate the influence of organized crime on youths encounter hostility as faith-based organizations and drug cartels compete for influence. This problem recalls the philosophical paradox that Nussbaum (1986) identifies as "the fragility of goodness." If one seeks to improve one's conditions, one must confront the world, but the mere fact of doing so also exposes oneself. As Butler (2016) puts it, protesting against precarity increases risk.

Beyond internal theological explanations, differences between actors and contexts also help to explain the differences in coping mechanisms among vulnerable religious minorities. The coping mechanisms of Cuban Christians are more developed than those in the sub-national areas of Mexico and Colombia that I studied, but this could be because Cuba is characterized by a prolonged vertical (state) oppression of religion, whereas the other two contexts suffer more sudden forms of repression by non-state actors. More research on the impact of the type of repression (i.e., prolonged or sudden) could help us understand the development of coping mechanisms in different contexts.

4. Implications for religious minorities, faith-based organizations implementing relief projects for victims of religious persecution, and human rights agencies

As we reflect on how religious minorities can apply coping mechanisms in the face of human security threats, the controversial point made by Hannah Arendt (2006 [1963]), that Jewish leaders may not have done enough to prevent the Holocaust, is worth mentioning: "The whole truth was that if the Jewish people had really been unorganized and fearless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people" (1963:125). Although Arendt received severe criticism for 'blaming the victims' of the Holocaust, this was not her intent. The Nazis (and the silent collaborating majority) were evidently guilty of the Holocaust, and Arendt recognizes that it would have been insensitive to expect the Jewish leaders to have resisted the Final Solution because of fear, ignorance of the Nazi projects, and the (in retrospect) naïve expectation that cooperating with the Nazis could have mitigated the harm (Elon 2006). However, Arendt features the courageous examples of the Danish population and Dutch Jewish leaders who resisted the implementation of the Final Solution on moral grounds. Their resistance had some impact on the attitude of Nazi officials.

Two recommendations for vulnerable religious minorities and for organizations wishing to help them can be inferred from Arendt's reflections on the Holocaust. The first is the need to raise awareness about the human security threats faced by

religious minorities, like the desperate attempts by SS officer Kurt Gerstein, the protagonist of Rolf Hochhuth's play *Der Stellvertreter. Ein christliches Trauerspiel* (The Deputy, a Christian Tragedy) (1975 [1963]), portrayed in the 2002 film *Amen*, to get the Vatican to take notice of the Final Solution. Lack of awareness of the Holocaust typified not only the international community but also the Jewish community itself, which was largely ignorant of the unfolding genocide. In my case studies, I observed a similar lack of awareness among religious groups. Issues such as the normalization of violence in northeast Mexico and the internalization of the restrictive definition of religious freedom as imposed by the communist regime in Cuba limit believers' full understanding of the human security situation in which they find themselves.

Second, regarding the documentation of human rights abuses, the overwhelming number of organizations in Latin American civil society, including faith-based organizations, neglect their responsibility to collect data. Most organizations are generally very good at talking about issues, creating attention-grabbing campaigns on social media, performing social diagnostics, and even making recommendations for public policy, but they rarely undertake the tedious, time-intensive, and sometimes dangerous task of documenting incidents. This is also true for the documentation of violations of religious freedom.

Having a clear picture of the threats to which religious minorities are vulnerable is strategically relevant because it can inform tactics that can contribute to making a religious minority more self-reliant and mitigate the risks it faces. This leads me to my second recommendation: develop and facilitate reflections about coping mechanisms. Avoidance and compliance seemed to be the default response of most members of the vulnerable religious minorities I studied. This is understandable considering the fear that results from the very real human security threats they face, but an adequate understanding of these threats as well as careful reflection on how they could possibly be mitigated could nevertheless be very beneficial.

Clearly, it is extremely difficult for many Christians in Latin America to even start considering coping mechanisms. Beyond fear of repression, there is a broadly shared sense that resisting the oppressors, whether they are the drug cartels or the Cuban government, is useless. In my interviews, I observed a sense that publicly addressing issues will not lead to a radical change in society. As a Colombian pastor from Cali stated, "When evil is so present, it kills all hope for change" (Harold Segura, personal interview, 2011).

Coping mechanisms are further underdeveloped because of a complex set of theological reasons. An insight from psychology about bullying illustrates how moral convictions, which may be rooted in religion, about compassion and the rejection of aggression – even when it is necessary for self-protection – can indeed make people vulnerable (Peterson 2018:23-24).

The predominance of certain theological options that rule out any form of social engagement, particularly in Pentecostal denominations that teach a strict segregation between 'spiritual' and 'earthly' matters, also explains an overall limited involvement in the pursuit of social justice and the underdevelopment of coping mechanisms.

In view of the multiple factors that discourage social engagement, it may not be surprising that the communities I surveyed have not developed a reflection about the concept of resilience. A logical response by faith-based organizations would therefore be to stimulate an active theological reflection on the value of resilience, while at the same time offering practical real-life examples of resilient religious communities, expanding the direction taken by the *Under Caesar's Sword* project (Philpott and Shah 2018). As Stout (2010) argues, grassroots religious groups, if they adopt effective strategies, can exercise real influence over policy and promote social justice. Compiling a manual of best practices of the application of coping mechanisms, similar to Gene Sharp's (1993) catalogue of 198 "methods of nonviolent action," could also serve a didactic purpose.

Along with the need to raise awareness and to stimulate reflection on coping mechanisms, the central importance of social wisdom is highlighted in all three case studies. The value of this skill resides in the fact that it informs how best to apply all other coping mechanisms, notably solidarity, collective action, taking up arms, and formal compliance with regulations even though their spirit is disrespected, as described in the case study on Cuban Christians.

To be effective, coping mechanisms must be used strategically. If not, they could have the counterproductive effect of increasing vulnerability instead of reducing it. This is not only a philosophical question but also a practical one. International advocacy in support of the human rights of Cuban Christians provides one example. When its tone is too confrontational and sensitive information is not handled carefully, Cuban Christians complain that they are hindered more than helped because the advocacy triggers more hostility from the government.

In the most extreme cases, it may be a form of social wisdom to remain silent about one's faith, as did the Portuguese Jesuit missionaries to Japan who are portrayed in *Silence* by Shūsaku Endō (1966). Similarly, in the Bible, Queen Esther stayed silent about her Jewish background for strategic purposes, positioning her to be instrumental later in achieving her people's salvation.

The importance of social wisdom is also illustrated by the case of the cultural dissidents in the Nasa *resguardos*. Contrary to the general trend I described, there is no lack of collective action among cultural dissidents, but this collective action may be too confrontational and uncompromising, contributing to a worsening of the conflict instead of solving it. The *Under Caesar's Sword* project reminds us that "Domestic advocacy is most effective when done quietly and respectfully by Christian leaders

who have nurtured relationships with local and national officials" (University of Notre Dame 2017:48). If the cultural dissidents would move away from their adversarial logic and instead adopt a "collaboration logic" (Vargas and Petri 2009), they might have better chances to succeed without increasing their vulnerability.

This is of course easier said than done, and it is especially difficult when religious minorities have antagonized the powers that be. It is nevertheless a direction worth exploring, in line with Habermas's recommendation to religious traditions to undertake the "arduous work of hermeneutic self-reflection" (2006:14). Generalizing, Christian converts should critically analyze the impact and meaning of their religious behavior in their community, as is the essence of Thielicke's *Verantwortungsethik* (1969). The religious rights of individual Christian converts should be respected, but it would be beneficial if they realized that, in their context, a church building is more than just a place of worship; it can also be seen as a symbol of political subversion, as Mexican sociologist José Refugio Arellano argues (personal interview, 2016). Buijs similarly encourages religious groups to "define orthodoxy in such a way that the reflective distance, the wisdom and serenity that are required to live in a non-perfect world is cultivated. Orthodoxy should be defined and transmitted to next generations as the opposite of radicalism" (2013:34).

It is also critical for both foreign and indigenous missionaries to understand the need for cultural sensitivity. As José Casanova observes, "Global denominationalism [international Christian missions] would also defend the principle of individual religious freedom, which includes the right to conversion and the attendant right to evangelize, but would recognize that there are both appropriate and inappropriate ways to evangelize" (2008:15).

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Freedom of religion or belief in urban planning of places of worship

An interreligious participatory mechanism in Manizales, Colombia

John F. Osorio[1]

Abstract

Freedom of religion or belief can be violated in different spheres of people's lives, such as schools, homes, hospitals or workplaces. This article considers issues in urban spaces, where planners make decisions that may affect the establishment and development of worship in the places designated for it. In Manizales, a Colombian city, an interreligious participatory mechanism was created to help identify these issues in greater detail. The article discusses how this mechanism helped to generate some proposals for the prevention of violations of freedom of religion or belief in urban planning.

Keywords interreligious dialogue, freedom of religion or belief, urban planning, places of worship, participatory action research, contextual theology.

1. Introduction

Decisions made by urban planners can directly or indirectly violate the freedom of religion or belief of those who establish places of worship in urban spaces. Identifying and understanding the factors related to such violations is especially important in situations where religion is not an important concern for planners (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2013). Since 2016, I have been observing places of worship in various countries, seeking to understand their relationship with the surrounding environment. From 2017 to 2019, I led the participation of religious entities in urban planning in Manizales, Colombia, which allowed me to understand that multiple related factors are involved in these situations.

In Morocco, Islamic places of worship have many privileges over others, as they are established even in airports and marketplaces and are part of the social fabric

[1] John F. Osorio was leader of Public Policy on Freedom of Religion or Belief for the Municipality of Manizales, Colombia from 2017 to 2020. Currently, he leads the urban planning project for places of worship in the Colombian Directorate of Religious Affairs. He holds two master's degrees, one in humanities and theology (Catholic University of Manizales) and the other in environment, development and civil engineering (National University of Colombia). Article received 2 July 2020; accepted 27 May 2021. This article uses American English. Contact: jfosorioc@unal.edu.co.

in a deeply rooted way. In contrast, the relatively few Christian places of worship are continually fighting for recognition of their religious freedom. In the United States or South Africa, the urban setting is very different, and one finds places of worship of various religious entities located almost naturally in the urban landscape. Places of worship appear in tourist areas such as New York's Fifth Avenue or in commercial areas of the streets of Durban. Unfortunately, due to concerns about religious extremism, rules for establishing mosques have been debated in generally free countries such as the United States (Lugo 2016) and Spain (Rodríguez 2017).

One way in which freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) could be violated is through zoning laws that prohibit places of worship in some areas. For example, in Montréal, Canada, tensions have arisen due to zoning restrictions that are incompatible with the appearance of new religious expressions in the territory. In 2011, the Superior Court of the province of Québec ordered the Church of God Mont-de-Sion to move its place of worship to another neighborhood, because it was in an area authorized for commerce and not for religious use. The Badr Islamic Center was threatened with a similar fate, but the Superior Court declared the zoning regulations inapplicable because it viewed them as violating the FoRB of the members of this religious group.

Guardia (2011) argues that places of worship should not be located far from communities, such as segregated commercial areas, but should be part of residential sectors, since proximity to religious services is one attribute of decent housing. Other factors such as public transportation should also be related to FoRB. In this regard, Ponce and Cabanilas referred to a situation in Mississippi, USA, where a Muslim group could not find adequate conditions to establish a place of worship near the urban center. The authors stated: "By making a mosque relatively inaccessible within city limits for Muslims who do not have a car, the city restricts the exercise of their religion" (Ponce and Cabanilas 2011:37).

Although this issue is a topic of increasing debate, there are few examples in the countries discussed above where the interreligious community participates in urban planning. Religious entities can help to identify ways in which FoRB may be violated. In Manizales, Colombia, an interreligious participatory mechanism was created to assist in identifying factors in planning processes, including natural risk management, road signs, urban safety, public lighting, georeferencing and zoning, that may affect FoRB. This article describes how that participatory mechanism was constructed, as well as factors identified and interventions proposed to improve the urban planning of places of worship in Manizales.

2. The state, urban planning and freedom of religion or belief

In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which contains a guarantee of freedom of religion. Many

Figure 1. Examples of places of worship in urban spaces. From left to right: **(1)** The Heritage Mosque Masjid Maryam, Durban, South Africa, in front of a housing facility and adjacent to an office area; **(2)** the Church of God Ministry of Jesus Christ International in Montreal, on Rue Sauvé E close to the metro station, markets, shops and schools; **(3)** places of worship on corridors of Jemaa el Fna Square in Marrakesh, Morocco; **(4)** St Patrick's Cathedral on Fifth Avenue, New York, in a popular tourist area. Source: Author.

other countries have adopted the UDHR and have committed themselves to guaranteeing FoRB (as it is now widely called) to their people. Over the years, FoRB has come to be understood as a multifaceted and multidimensional right that encompasses different spheres of human life, such as the guarantee of religious practice in all types of places of worship.

Because they are physical structures located in urban spaces, these worship places are regulated by urban planning, which deals not only with places of worship, but also with educational, safety and health facilities, among others. Urban planning implies an exercise of state intervention, since it constitutes "a regulatory, bureaucratic and procedural activity" (Tewdwr-Jones 1999:123). The question arises: to what extent can or should a state guarantee FoRB through the urban planning of places of worship?

Mazumdar and Mazumdar (2013:222) affirm that religion is not greatly considered in planning, and they describe this as an "unfortunate neglect." They add that due to secularization, the role of religion is often overlooked, but that there are many reasons why it should be understood and included in urban planning. Bielefeldt, Ghanea, and Wiener (2016) reflect on the secularity of the state and argue that it has been understood in two ways: in a positive sense, related to a state's commitment to FoRB as part of religious pluralism, or negatively as an antireligious attitude.

Depending on their conception of the state, urban planning may seek to benefit all religious entities equally, or it may not seek to benefit any. The approach is related to the state's approach to religious neutrality, which theoretically can be understood either as non-intervention in religious matters or as offering support to all religious entities without taking into account the prevalence of Anyone of them and without favoring any particular religious group.

To enjoy the positive sense of secularity, various authors have recommended that the state, while not identifying itself with any particular belief group (political secularism), should also differentiate itself from "doctrinal secularism." Manouchehrifar (2018) describes secularism in planning from a positive perspective, calling on planners to separate their personal religious affiliation from the political status they hold as planners so that the accommodation of a multiplicity of religious beliefs and identities can be achieved. In addition, he believes that secularism forces planners to ensure that their interventions do not infringe upon FoRB, and he advises planners to be self-critical of government structures.

Bielefeldt, Ghanea, and Wiener (2016) also presented a general criticism of the states, arguing that none of them comply or even attempt to comply, in practice, with the norms of normative universalism. They emphasize that FoRB must protect the rights of members of both large and small communities, as well as minorities. Thus, the state must guarantee through urban planning the FoRB of religious communities, regardless of the size of their religious buildings or how long they have been there. These authors also point out that FoRB cannot have the status of a human right unless it shares a universalist character, which defines the UDHR's approach to human rights in general. To reflect the universalist character of FoRB, urban planning must grant inclusive treatment to the different religious entities that establish their places of worship in urban spaces. Bielefeldt et al. add that "respecting the self-understanding of all human beings must remain the starting point and a guiding principle for any universalistic conceptualization of Freedom of Religion or Belief" (2016:19).

The foregoing discussion implies that planners must know the religious panorama of the territory where their work is carried out. To achieve this goal, it is advisable to carry out an interreligious dialogue that listens to the different voices of local residents and groups. If we start from the postulate that respect for self-understanding is the first step toward guaranteeing FoRB, then we could deduce that any urban planning policy that does not know the self-understanding of religious entities is at risk of violating the FoRB of these religious entities. In fact, Bielefeldt et al. affirm that the state, as part of its responsibility to protect human rights, must provide an adequate infrastructure to make rights effective and must carry out various actions, including the promotion of "interreligious dialogue initiatives" (2016:34).

The exercise of listening to communities through participatory mechanisms in order to grasp their self-understanding in urban decisions is known as Participatory Urban Planning (Oliveras 2008). In the case of places of worship, interreligious dialogue is important not only for this purpose, but also to guarantee FoRB in its universalist conceptualization. Taking into account that urban planning is also "the set of social mechanisms and processes through which different behaviors

and movements affect the transformation of the city, are consciously controlled and determine its development" (Ledrut 1985:43), I propose the following compilation of the above-mentioned principles:

> The state must implement participatory mechanisms based on interreligious dialogue within urban planning in order to guarantee FoRB from its universal perspective. In this way, a positive sense of secularity is established in the state, allowing religious entities to participate, to present their self-understanding of how they and their places of worship inhabit the territory, and to propose urban planning solutions.

I emphasize the word "mechanism" because interreligious dialogue must entail more than a simple meeting of people and must be established as a fundamental urban element within planning processes.

3. The Colombian context

Colombia belongs to the UN General Assembly and was a signatory of the UDHR in 1948. Later, it signed the American Convention on Human Rights in 1969 and included the protection of FoRB in its 1991 constitution. Afterwards, Law 133 of 1994, or the Law of Freedom of Religion or Belief, was enacted.

Subsequently, Colombia passed Law 388 of 1998, which establishes the conditions for planning a territory but does not require the participation of religious communities to make decisions about places of worship, neither are there any binding policies that ensure the inclusion of the perspective of religious communities in the planning of their places of worship.

According to Open Doors (2016), Colombia is the only country in Latin America in the top 50 of countries with some level of persecution of Christians. In 2018, the Public Policy of Freedom of Religion or Belief was decreed in Colombia, and in the same year, Manizales became the first city in the country to adopt a policy to protect its inhabitants' FoRB. Between 2017 and 2019, the Interreligious Dialogue for Urbanism (INDIUR) was created in Manizales as a mechanism to guarantee FoRB in urban planning.

4. The methodology for developing the interreligious participatory mechanism

Manizales, founded in 1849 and located in the western part of Colombia, has 430,000 inhabitants and is highly multi-confessional (Moreno 2012). It has 65 religious entities, including Buddhists, Christians, and Hindus, among others. Of these religious organizations, 45 participated in this research (69 percent); these participants have a total of 160 places of worship in Manizales.

Before selecting a methodology, the initiative first needed to identify the scope and objectives of the project. The participants decided that they wanted a mechanism, composed of different religious entities, that could influence state decisions concerning places of worship based on the self-understanding of each religious group. In other words, we wanted not just to establish an interreligious dialogue, but also a participatory mechanism in urban decision making.

Having clarified our purpose, we selected the Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology, which Park (1992:137) describes as "an intentional way of empowering people so that they can take specific actions to improve their living conditions." PAR is a qualitative method that combines study and action. As those involved carry out collective actions, participation itself becomes the research activity, since participants go from being research objects to research subjects. According to Gonzales-Laporte (2014), this methodology was promoted in Colombia in the 1970s by researchers such as Borda and Rahman (1991), who saw participatory research as a way for the social sciences to apply knowledge for the purpose of human transformation. This methodology has transcended borders and has been used with great effectiveness in North America, Latin America, and Europe.

Some features that characterize the application of PAR are continuous and participatory observation; experiential, active, and dynamic techniques; a focus on self-description; and the systematic return of the knowledge obtained to the studied group with ongoing feedback (Borda 1992; Murcia 2002). In this research, information gathering entailed six focus groups, two interviews, two surveys, one exercise of social cartography, and theological reflections. Finally, our methodology included a documentary review of theology related to interreligious dialogue, which was subsequently discussed with the INDIUR team.

5. Contributions from theology to the construction of INDIUR

How does one establish an interreligious dialogue that can serve as a mechanism for the urban planning of places of worship? This question involves not only sociology, but also theology. Debates have persisted for centuries over how a dialogue between religions can be not only initiated but sustained over time. Theology is related to the PAR methodology, as long as it is done in a contextual manner (Meza, Suárez, and Martínez 2017).

Contextual theology refers to doing theology not with dogmatic exclusivity but in relationship with social problems and situations. There exist, for example, feminist, ecological, indigenous, African American, black, Amerindian, interreligious, intercultural, and economic theologies (Vélez 2005). In this regard, Lonergan (1972:9) states:

> Talking about contextual theologies implies definitively changing the conception of theology. It cannot continue to be understood in its classical sense as a reflection

> on God, but as a mediation between a certain cultural matrix and the meaning and value of a religion within that matrix.

The dialogue conducted at INDIUR is social and political in nature, seeking to investigate and intervene in urban matters. Pannikar's reflection is very appropriate here: "Interreligious dialogue does not only take place within religious institutions. The religious dimension of human beings permeates each and every political activity." (2017:224).

In a context such as INDIUR, all participants must sense that their spiritual identity is respected, since otherwise they will not return and the interreligious dialogue will not last. Torradeflot (2012) explains that the dialogue does not imply the mixing of religions or the loss of their individual religious identity. Pannikar (2017:126) says, "Apologetics has its own function and place, but not here, in the encounter between religions."

Instead of discussing beliefs, INDIUR became a place to build consensus regarding ways to ensure FoRB for all. As Knitter (2007:103) states, "Interreligious dialogue can be used for common social, environmental or even political concerns, so that different religions can cooperate with each other creating a social or political space, a more specific place in which to live."

Knitter describes four models of interreligious dialogue. He begins with the model of substitution, in which each participant seeks to prevail and persuade the other through theological argumentation. That is not what happens at INDIUR. Instead, the activity there is closer to Knitter's acceptance model, which recognizes that "the religious traditions of the world are really different and we have to recognize and accept those differences" (Knitter 2007:330).

Implementing the acceptance model allows us to create a welcoming and respectful setting for interreligious dialogue. However, that alone is not enough, since the purpose of INDIUR is also to reflect on and act in relation to FoRB in urban planning.

Therefore, the acceptance model is complemented by the Global Ethic Project of Küng (1998), who allows us to reflect on places of worship as contributors to change within an area, regardless of the religious beliefs held. There are ethical values or a "global ethos" that must be known in urban planning so that better projections can be made as to how land use will impact urban space. Küng (1998:80) explains that in all religions there is a "Golden rule" equivalent to that of Christianity: "Do to others what we want them to do to us." In this way, common points can be found in which the religious entities are in solidarity with each other in the search for respect of FoRB, without this collaboration implying the loss of the identity of each one.

Based on this commitment to an "ethical model of acceptance" and a participatory approach to urban planning, along with other theological reflections, the following guidelines were adopted for INDIUR:

1. Understand that other people's places of worship have a sacred character to them, even if it does not for you.
2. Allow other individuals to be themselves in their urban space and respect their way of inhabiting the territory.
3. Accept the religious identity of one another while firmly retaining your own identity.
4. Acknowledge the areas in common with others without entering their private space to try to convince them of your belief.
5. Achieve interreligious cooperation to identify global ethical values that are taught in places of worship and that impact each territory where they are located.
6. Serve as mediators in urban planning before government entities.
7. An impartial actor can be invited to the Dialogue who takes the reflections of religious entities and helps them turn these into public actions.

6. The identification of violations of the freedom of religion or belief in urban planning

For this exercise, religious entities were represented by their leaders. A diverse set of techniques were applied over a two-year period. First, a preliminary survey helped us identify the situations about which religious leaders were most strongly concerned. Eighty percent of respondents expressed concern about safety and inadequate lighting in the area around their places of worship. One religious organization said that the number of believers attending one of their churches had dropped from 200 to 100 in the past year because the surrounding area had become unsafe, showing a close connection between security and FoRB in urban spaces. Likewise, 60 percent indicated that the state had not provided sufficient road signage around their places of worship, causing a heightened risk of accidents, especially as people were arriving at or departing from worship. Several other concerns were expressed by between 20 and 30 percent of respondents: external noise affecting their services, the absence of parking areas, or interruptions caused by traffic authorities during worship times. Finally, between 10 and 20 percent noted concern about physical damage to their places of worship, the high cost of renting property, and exposure to natural risks such as landslides and fires.

Focus groups were convened to discuss these issues and understand the perspectives of religious leaders more deeply. For example, some minority communities expressed their dissatisfaction with the fact that in urban spaces, small places

of worship are often compared to garages, with the result that many Colombians somewhat contemptuously call these fellowships "garage churches." They emphasized that their facilities are places for religious celebrations and not garages! It was also noted that urban planners required places of worship to provide the same number of parking spaces as for shopping centers. The leaders expressed the view that these two functions are very different: whereas shopping centers receive people 14 hours a day throughout the week, many places of worship are open only two days a week for 2 hours each.

The focus group discussion also highlighted the experience of one place of worship, located on a mountainside, that had to be evacuated as a preventive measure due to the risk of landslides. The participant suggested that such risks should be mitigated in order to enable the church to continue holding worship services.

Moreover, it was found that the municipal government had identified only had 72 places of worship, whereas in reality there were more than 180. Therefore, urban planners have been making their decisions based on their knowledge of fewer than half of all existing places.

These observations showed that FoRB in a particular location is related to natural risk management, urban safety, signage, and georeferencing, among other factors.

A social mapping exercise was carried out with the religious leaders who have their places of worship in the 11 districts of the city, in which these leaders located on a map their places of worship, as well as nearby schools, transportation routes, business districts, areas of poor security, and anything else they considered important. This helped to understand the ways in which the religious entities function in their communities. Among the most important observations, the leaders confirmed that places of worship are places of social cohesion. Many relationships exist between these places of worship and their environment – they are not isolated points in the urban space, but rather they coexist with commercial establishments, houses, schools, and the places of worship of other religious organizations, among others. We found that religious leaders are interested in making their places of worship visible in their local communities and that they seek to select locations in areas of high population density. Therefore, it can be deduced that any urban planning activity that prevents the location of places of worship in these spaces, would ignore these characteristics, interests and self-understanding.

INDIUR participated in the elaboration of the city's land use plan, which is updated every 12 years, and discovered that a restriction had been adopted declaring that places of worship should be located more than 50 meters away from games of chance or gambling places. But in Manizales, there are about 300 gambling sites, distributed throughout all the neighborhoods. This means

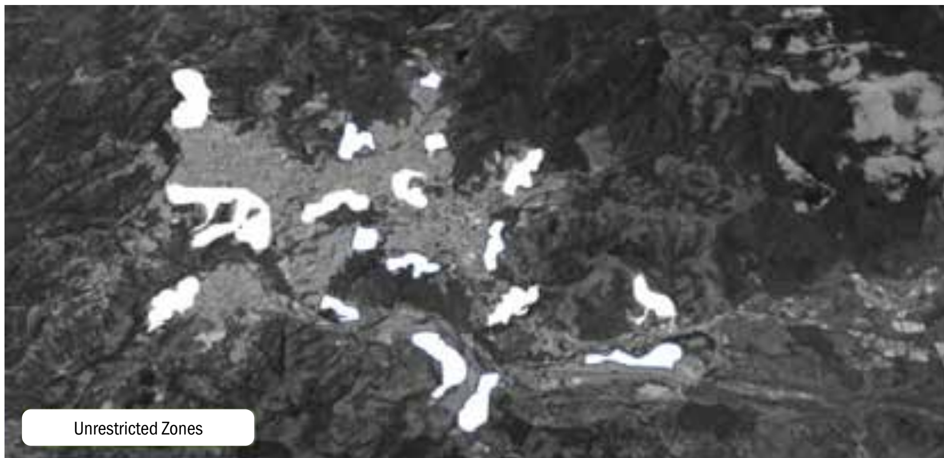

Figure 2. Unrestricted zones. Source: Prepared by the author.

that the restriction would leave very few options available for the location of new places of worship. Figure 2 shows (in white) the only areas that would have been available to locate places of worship had this restriction been approved.

Finally, interviews were conducted with the religious leaders of the INDIUR team, who were asked why they were attracted to their particular urban location. The result of this inquiry is perhaps the most important part of this research, since we learned that many religious entities locate their places of worship as a direct consequence of their religious beliefs. For example, some religious entities choose central sites in the city because they affirm that God is at the center of everything, while others are located high in the mountains because they consider that God is in the heights. Most of the religious organizations are located in urban spaces according to their characteristic doctrinal criteria. For example, the Church of God Ministry of Jesus Christ International believes it has a message from the Holy Spirit to establish a place of worship in every neighborhood. That is why it is of great interest to this religious organization to be able to locate its places of worship in any area of urban space. The Hare Krishna community and the Anglican community, for their part, seek to locate their places of worship, exclusively in vulnerable areas, because they believe that the poor are those in greatest need of God's help. Roman Catholics and Orthodox located their main places of worship in the center of the city because they think that God must be close to everyone. Therefore, from this research we observe that if urban planning makes decisions without taking these religious beliefs into account, then it can violate FoRB through these urban decisions.

Situation Places of Worship (PW)	**Places of Worship by year**				**Entity in charge**
	2017	2018	2019	2020	
PW in landslide risk areas	2	0	0	0	Risk Management Unit
PW at risk from fire	15	15	15	15	Firefighters
PW with high insecurity	21	19	17	17	Secretary Government
PW with moderate security	24	24	20	20	
PW with poor road safety	55	48	44	39	Secretary Traffic
PW far from public transport route	25	27	25	25	
PW with low public lighting	18	10	8	8	INVAMA
PW ith blows or graffiti	4	7	7	5	Secretary Government

Table 1. Situations faced by places of worship. Source: Municipality of Manizales.

7. Proposals for the prevention of violations of freedom of religion or belief

Below are the most outstanding accomplishments of INDIUR:

- The team succeeded in including Line 4 in the Public Policy on Freedom of Religion or Belief of Manizales, "Inclusion of Freedom of Religion or Belief in Urban Planning." It contains such actions as carrying out a security assessment of places of worship and developing a road safety plan to protect believers from the risk of traffic accidents (Municipality of Manizales 2018).
- INDIUR managed the construction of two retaining walls to stabilize the slope of two places of worship, which were at high risk of suffering landslides.
- A protocol was developed for giving priority attention to places of worship that are exposed to fire risk because they are made of wood, straw, bamboo, or other flammable materials.
- With the help of the Secretary of Traffic, the team posted signs at 12 places of worship that were at high risk due to frequent traffic accidents. The signs contain the national logo, but it was modified to be neutral for all religious entities.
- As for the city's land use plan, the team presented its concerns regarding the number of parking spaces required and managed to extend the condition of building a parking space for every 40 square meters of worship area to one parking space for every 50 square meters. It also secured a provision indicating that the construction of parking lots is required for places of worship greater than 200 square meters in size (Municipality of Manizales 2017).

- The team helped to create a table of indicators that allow citizens to monitor the actions carried out each year by the local government for the benefit of places of worship (see Table 1).

8. Conclusions

Many factors have been identified by religious entities as related to violations of FoRB in urban planning. They include:

- Failure to locate places of worship on the cartography of the city.
- Failure to identify places of worship in areas facing natural risks such as landslides.
- Not having a protocol of attention for places of worship in case of fire.
- Not managing urban safety around places of worship through such actions as good public lighting and the nearby location of police facilities, among others.
- Not providing proper signage and signaling on roads near places of worship so as to prevent traffic accidents, especially when worshippers are arriving or leaving.
- Not guaranteeing access roads or transport routes and platforms wide enough for people to reach the place of worship.
- Equating places of worship with shopping centers with regard to requirements for parking.

Theology enables important reflections so that interreligious dialogue does not remain at the level of transitory encounters but becomes a lasting and transforming mechanism in which the self-understanding of each person is acknowledged, the identity of all participating religious entities is respected, and cooperation between participants is promoted. In addition, theology has provided some useful parameters and guidelines that would facilitate the application of a similar mechanism in other locations to help in guaranteeing FoRB in urban planning. The discovery that theology can make an important contribution to urban planning was itself significant.

The most interesting contribution of this initiative, in my opinion, was the awareness that religious entities located in an urban space have operational criteria specific to each religion. Much research has been conducted on how theology and doctrine are reflected in the architecture of places of worship, but little is known about how theology and doctrine affect the choice of a worship location in an urban area. This is an important point to consider in urban planning so as not to violate the FoRB of any citizens.

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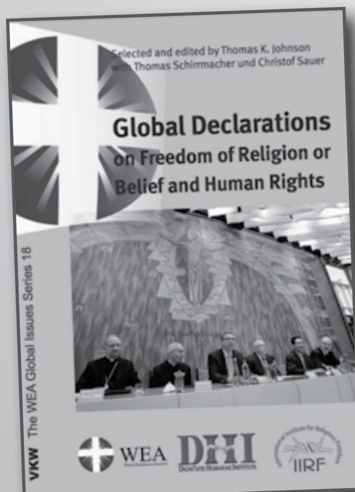

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