



International Institute
for Religious Freedom

Integrating insights from various disciplines into research and education on the persecution of Christians and freedom of religion or belief for all

Lessons from My Life's Journey

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This paper is a call to Christian scholars in all relevant fields of academic research to engage in religious freedom studies and to join this growing global community of scholars.

But it is also a call to Christian scholars to collaborate with scholars of all faiths or none, and to present the results of their research in such a way that they can be shared and discussed with any scholar of good will around the world, also making them accessible for media, governments, and parliaments, which usually represent a mix of worldviews.

Examples will be given from fields in which the speaker himself has been involved globally over the past four decades, such as systematic theology, political ethics, cultural anthropology, sociology of religion, historical studies, and interreligious dialogue.

1

The idea of religious freedom originated from religious minorities within Christianity since 1641 and from the minority of Jews since 1783.

2

Therefore, Christians and Jews must confidently participate in the global promotion and implementation of this idea, even though it is now shared by people of all religions

and beliefs as part of the canon of human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

3

The study of persecution and martyrdom must find its way back to the heart of Christian systematic theology and become an integral part of every subject of theological studies, e.g. Christology, ecclesiology, church history, ethics, missiology or pastoral care.

4

This must happen in cooperation with all churches, as we all believe in the foremost martyr, Jesus himself, we need to learn from the Eastern churches in general, as well as from their experience with persecution. We must also acknowledge that persecutors rarely care what kind of Christian they persecute or martyr.

5

The same applies to the broader question of freedom of religion or belief for everyone. Theologians should be able to explain the basis of this freedom in terms of dogma and political ethics in a clear, easy-to-understand way.

6

This includes a critical study of the ways in which Christianity has lived up to or violated its own standards throughout history. The OT and NT prove our faith to be highly self-critical and always including honest investigation and even repentance. At the same time, we must combat religious extremism and fundamentalism within our own ranks.

7

In addition to theological perspectives, Christians are interested in secular and empirical perspectives that examine reality in history and the present. We should become leaders in this area of research.

8

Thus, every known academic field of research has a potential to help describe, evaluate, and ameliorate issues of the suppression of religious freedom, whether the researchers or the victims belong to the Christian faith or to any other major or minor faith or worldview.

9

As a result, we need global cooperation with people of goodwill in research and advocacy, as well as a willingness to build and work within global networks related to these efforts.