



## Religious Agency and the Integration of Marginalized People

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### Introduction

Mounting empirical research suggests that violations of religious freedom and agency, both by governments and powerful social actors, tend to reinforce oppressive structures that marginalize, or prevent integration of, impoverished people, exploited women, migrants, ethnic and religious minorities, and outcasts. Protections of religious agency, on the other hand, particularly the right to practice, interpret, criticize, or change one's faith, act as powerful engines of empowerment and integration of otherwise marginalized people. Repression of this religious agency, moreover, produces cycles of persecution, societal instability, and violence that redound disproportionately on fragile economic and social institutions of integration. Sadly, in many places around the world we see massive repression of this empowering religious agency. Indeed, religious discrimination serves as a major driver of marginalization in numerous societies.

This paper presents the findings of major research initiatives sponsored by the Religious Freedom Project at Georgetown University.[1] Involving commissioned studies by multiple scholars and teams, this research enterprise draws upon unprecedented global data and employs sophisticated methodologies to explore the empirical relationships between the freedom of religious exercise and human flourishing. In this paper I will provide the context for this research, synthesize key empirical findings, and outline the initial liniments of a theoretical framework for understanding them. The challenge of the Plenary Session has helped me comprehend the significance of *religious agency* as a crucial dimension of empowerment and inclusion.

A word about terms. In this paper I often use the terms *religious agency* and *religious freedom* interchangeably. This makes sense, in part, because agency represents the active dimension of religious freedom as defined in international law. Agency suggests the capacity to act on – or change – ones beliefs, commitments, relationships, and religious practices. This capacity, as I will show, helps explain the powerful impact of religious freedom on human development, good governance, and inclusion. In another sense, religious freedom enables more specific forms of beneficial agency. In some instances, therefore, it is pertinent to employ the broader rubric of religious freedom, as in explorations of its impact on international peace. In other cases, such as women's empowerment, agency captures the more specific dynamics at play.

### Why Religious Agency Matters

Before turning to specific research findings, it is helpful to outline features of the global context that underscore why religious agency matters, especially now.

1) Religious agency matters to integration and inclusion because religion matters.

Any framework for understanding the dynamics of exclusion or integration must reckon with the force of religion in societies across the globe. The global resurgence of religion, both demographically and in terms of public impact, came as the great surprise of our age. Contrary to predictions of the West's leading minds from the 19th century onward, secularization peaked in 1970 and then began to retreat in most parts of the globe, as religious communities began to push back at their marginalization by secular forces and states in what Gilles Kepel termed *The Revenge of God*. [2] Thus not only have we seen a demographic expansion of religious affiliation, but religious movements now exercise more independence from states, marshal greater resources, and command greater transnational authority than they ever have before. This is, for good or ill, *God's Century*. [3]

Global demographic growth rates, moreover, indicate that that the world's population will become even more religious in the future, dwarfing the non-religious. This trend owes to the fact that fertility rates are extremely low for non-religious or unaffiliated populations, while the religious devout (of diverse religious traditions) tend to have larger families and often invite others into their ranks. [4] Drawing upon demographic projections of the Pew Research Center, Grim and Connor chart the changing religious and non-religious shares of the global. In 1970, the unaffiliated (or non-religious) share of the world's population stood at nearly a fifth (19%). This reflected, in large part, the height of communist (and atheist) power in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, China, Vietnam, etc. In many cases religious movements have filled the void caused by the collapse of communism. So despite the decline of religious affiliation in Western Europe since 1970, the unaffiliated share of global

population had shrunk to 16% by 2010, and by 2050 it will decline further to 13%.<sup>[5]</sup> Moreover, this latter figure hinges on very conservative estimates of growth rates of religious affiliation in China, especially for Christianity. If projections by Fenggang Yang (the leading expert on religion in China) bear out, then the global percentage of the non-religious will be even lower than 13%.<sup>[6]</sup>

Consequently, for an increasing majority of the global population into the future, religion will powerfully anchor forms of identity, meaning, community, and purpose. This is particularly fateful for poor women, the doubly marginalized. Given that these women in developing societies often disproportionately belong to religious communities and adhere to faith commitments, guaranteeing or expanding their agency in religion is pivotal to their broader integration.

Solutions to exclusion and marginalization, therefore, cannot rely on the secular assumptions of economic factors, but must, as the introduction to this plenary program observes, flow from a proper “anthropological” framework. As Timothy Shah documents, anthropological (and psychological) research suggests “that the capacity for religious belief is natural; that belief appears early and easily in the lives of individuals; that it appeared full-blown at the dawn of human civilization; and that the suppression of religious belief, expression, and practice runs against the grain of human nature and experience”.<sup>[7]</sup> Repression of what people experience as fundamental to their human dignity fuels division, destabilizes societies, and undermines integration.

## 2) Religious agency matters because religious diversity matters.

The dominant paradigm in the sociology of religion finds that, at the deepest ontological level, the default condition of religion is diversity.<sup>[8]</sup> While societies and states once expected (and some still strive to impose) religious uniformity, that model is increasingly untenable in the global age. Sociologist Peter Berger, once a leading theorist of the secularization thesis, now says he was wrong in thinking that modernization and globalization would bring secularization; rather, they bring plurality, as people of widely diverse religious beliefs and practices find themselves cheek to jowl with religious others. With travel, migrations, and now massive refugee flows, people encounter a dizzying religious pluralism, where “everyone is everywhere”, as Berger puts it.<sup>[9]</sup> The denial or repression of this diversity produces persecution, social hostility, violence, and instability. People in a diverse and fervently religious world must find a way of navigating their shared lives.

## 3) Religious agency matters because it is enshrined as a fundamental right in international law.

Article 18 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, reads as follows:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance.

Notice the emphasis on active agency in the definition. Similar language is found in the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, the *Helsinki Accords*, the *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief*, and the *European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*.

As with the foundational Vatican II proclamation *Dignitatis Humanae*, the *Universal Declaration* anchors religious agency in human dignity and its correlates. Indeed, the preface to the *Declaration* roots all rights in the “inherent dignity” and “worth of the human person”, and in the “equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family” who are “endowed with reason and conscience”. Article 18 also emphasizes the relational aspect of human life, that people must be free “in community with others” to manifest their faith or beliefs. *Dignity, equal worth, reason, conscience, and community* – these traits of common humanity provide the clues to why agency in religion can play such a powerful role in integration and inclusion.

Not surprisingly, the freedom to exercise one’s faith unmolested is a near universal aspiration. In a recent Pew Global Attitudes Survey, over 90% of respondents in every region on earth indicated that it was important to them to live in a country where they can practice religion freely (only 2% saying it wasn’t important at all).<sup>[10]</sup>

## 4) Religious agency matters because it is massively denied.

Global measures by the Pew Research Center find that over three-quarters of the world’s population live amidst high restrictions on their religious practice, either by repressive government actions or hostile social agents.<sup>[11]</sup> Companion global data from the Religion and State Project at Bar-Ilan University in Israel document an astonishing array of repressive government practices against religion, especially targeting religious and ethnic minorities who are uniquely vulnerable to marginalization.<sup>[12]</sup> If the default condition of religion is diversity, and if freedom to exercise one’s transcendent duties – to seek truth about ultimate questions and act on them – is a near universal aspiration, then government or social repression will inevitably cause harm to societies,

governance, and economics. We see this in the devastating marginalization of Baha'is in Iran, where theocratic leaders treat them as a contagion to be eradicated. We see it in the efforts of Hindu nationalists in India to marginalize non-Hindu minorities. The list goes on. Indeed, the Pew Research Center finds that government restrictions on religion are strongly related to social hostilities and violent religious extremism. It is thus highly unlikely that societies can erect structures and build norms of inclusion and uplift if wracked by such forces.

With the context provided by these four factors, we can now explore in some detail new research findings into the pathways of religious agency in uplift and integration.

### **Religious Agency, Sustainable Development, and Women's Empowerment**

A growing literature documents the links between economic outcomes and religious freedom (and the agency it entails). One of the most active scholars investigating the links between religious liberty and inclusive economic development is Brian Grim. After directing the landmark annual reports for the Pew Research Center on global restrictions, Grim left in 2014 to found the Business and Religious Freedom Foundation, which documents the quantitative and causal relationships between religious liberty, thriving business, and sustainable economic development. Grim anchors this research in the UN and World Bank definition of sustainable development: "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". He then prodigiously tests (and controls for) virtually every other explanation that could explain the strong relationships he finds between low restrictions on religion and sustainable economic development. He concludes that religious freedom contributes to sustainable and inclusive development – and their underlying socioeconomic conditions – in at least seven ways:

- 1) Fosters respect for differing faiths and beliefs, which is crucial to stable societies in a world in which 8 of 10 people identify with a religious faith and which produces the societal diversity shown to be beneficial to economic growth.
- 2) Helps reduce corruption, which is a key ingredient in sustainable development. Laws and practices that burden religion are strongly related to higher levels of corruption and they prevent faith-based values from checking corruption in business.
- 3) Engenders peace by diffusing religious tensions and reducing religion-related violence, a huge drag on foreign investment and business growth which rely on stability and predictability.
- 4) Encourages broader freedoms that contribute to positive socio-economic development, by removing what Amartya Sen calls the sources of "unfreedom". For example, Grim's research shows the strong link between religious freedom and protection of property rights.
- 5) Enables religious groups to play a measurable role in the human and social development of countries, especially the development of human capital through education, health care, and agricultural development.
- 6) Overcomes government over-regulation associated with such things as coercive blasphemy and anti-conversion laws. Repressive religious environments inhibit entrepreneurial activity, foreign direct investment, and economic synergies. Persecution is bad for business.
- 7) Multiplies trust among employees whose faith and beliefs are respected, which improves workplace morale and encourages creative input, as well as signaling to stakeholders that the company is ethical. The global consulting firm McKinsey has shown the value of ethical branding to business.[13]

Grim and colleagues then conduct systematic quantitative analysis to measure the actual impact of religious liberty on sustainable economic growth. With appropriate scholarly caution the authors note that broad social and political outcomes flow from diverse factors and that religious freedom is not a "silver bullet" or "secret solution to the world's ills". Nonetheless, their research indicates that the "tandem effects of governmental restrictions on religion and social hostilities" strongly inhibit economic growth. Remarkably, this relationship is more significant than most of the conventional economic predictors of economic performance. To demonstrate this impact, and to test and control for alternative causal explanations, Grim and his co-authors incorporate no less than 25 factors in their structural equation model to predict GDP growth. These include the common theoretical, economic, political, social, and demographic variables of economics research, such as tax rates, tariff rates, population size, government expenditures, public debt, foreign direct investment, corruption, etc. Of these 25 variables *only four* had statistically significant impact on GDP growth: religious restrictions, religious hostilities, 5-year GDP growth, and monetary freedom. In other words, mainstream economists have been ignoring one of the most important factors in sustainable economic growth: religious liberty, as embodied in low levels of restrictions and hostilities. This astonishing finding leads the researchers to conclude that "religious freedom contributes to better economic and business outcomes and that advances in religious freedom are in the self-interest of businesses, governments, and societies by contributing to successful and sustainable enterprises that benefit societies and individuals".[14]

The role of religious agency – as illustrated by Robert Woodberry’s landmark research on the impact of Protestant missionary activity in fueling democratization – also shows up in economic uplift. Missionary initiatives that promoted literacy (especially for girls), printing, and honesty in public affairs also nurtured and diffused human capital and the development of institutions which protected indigenous property rights and the rule of law in developing nations. All of these factors support long-term economic growth. Astonishingly, Woodberry found that conversionary Protestant activity prior to 1960 still had a strong positive association with national income levels 75 years later.[15]

These findings dovetail with a special concern of development economists: the status and uplift of women, whose repression operates as a drag on sustainable economic growth. Grim and Finke’s analysis of global data reveals a strong statistical relationship between religious freedom and women’s empowerment, which supports their broader theory that protecting religious rights contributes to peaceful flourishing societies and integration of marginalized people.[16] Moreover, measures of the UN Human Development Report’s *Gender Inequality Index* show a direct correlation between religious tolerance and gender equality.[17]

The obverse also emerges robustly from the data. Higher government and social restrictions on religion, as Brian Grim and Jo-Ann Lyon recently documented, are strongly associated with gender inequality. Indeed, the nations with the highest religious restrictions also show the highest levels of such inequality. In other words, women’s status is lowest where restrictions on religious freedom are greatest.[18]

One cannot understate the potential significance of these findings. Global oppression of women not only represents a massive human rights violation; it serves as a key barrier to economic development and the eradication of extreme poverty. In their book, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*, Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl Wudunn catalogue the devastating oppression of women and girls in the developing world and show how female empowerment will unleash economic progress and uplift for the poor.[19]

To be sure, no one contends that extending religious rights is more important than other economic, social, and educational levers of women’s empowerment. But as we will see, fascinating new research reveals how restrictive government religious policies are intimately linked with structures that constrict opportunities for women. Expanding religious choices, on the other hand, produces tangible improvement in women’s status.

Of all the relationships developed by scholars this seems the most paradoxical or counter-intuitive, because religion itself is often seen as a major barrier to gender parity. How could religious freedom enhance women’s status when religion justifies, if not propels, much of the institutionalized discrimination against women around the world today? Why would one want to empower the very patriarchal institutions that repress women and constrict girls’ horizons?

These questions reflect a profound misunderstanding about what religious freedom is and is not. By definition, the protection of religious rights signifies the opposite of favoring or empowering a dominant faith. Full religious freedom entails the right to criticize or leave one’s inherited religion. As Brian Grim, Rebecca Shah, and others have shown, extending these options of “exit and voice” empowers women in traditional societies. This crucial dynamic is particularly potent for women in highly religious societies who themselves are often devout.

The freedom and agency to criticize, reform, reinterpret, or change one’s religion; the right to form new religious associations for mutual support; the ability to teach new ideas about faith – these dimensions of religious freedom facilitate women’s participation in civil society, expand educational opportunities for young women, and spur female economic enterprise. In regimes of general religious freedom no one sect can monopolize discourse, making it harder to enforce a single anti-female narrative or sustain hierarchies detrimental to women’s advancement. Moreover, greater agency in religious matters can powerfully translate into other social and economic initiatives. Religious rights build upon and buoy the rights to speech, assembly, and property ownership so essential to social and economic advancement of the marginalized.

On the other hand, various forms of government and social restrictions on religion tend to cement oppressive structures against women. The collusion of states with dominant religions – a remarkably common practice – prevents women from leaving repressive situations, narrows their societal options, and constricts their economic participation. This is obvious with theocratic nations like Saudi Arabia. But even in democratic states, such as India, state laws that favor the dominant religion tend to freeze low-status women in rigid caste structures, as research by Rebecca Shah shows.[20]

As we would expect from Grim and Finke’s *religious violence cycle*, government restrictions on religion also invite social hostilities against vulnerable people, often under the guise of protecting traditional culture.[21] When dominant social groups can act with impunity against religious minorities or dissenters, the mob violence and intimidation falls disproportionately on women, the doubly marginalized.

The rise of extremist religious ideologies represents the most dramatic example of this dynamic and illuminates how violations of religious freedom disproportionately redound against women and girls. Indeed, it is the twin rejection of religious pluralism and women's agency that helps define jihadist ideology. Not surprisingly, the prime victims of such extremist groups as ISIS, Boko Haram, and the Taliban are religious minorities, women, and girls. Indeed, pushing back on women's rights is a key component of their deadly strategy. Under the sway of their theocratic ideology we see dramatic reversals in women's status and a descent into grotesque forms of sexual violence, trafficking, and bondage.

In sum, places with the greatest measurable religious freedom also demonstrate the greatest empowerment and participation by women in all sectors of society. Nations with the highest government and social restrictions on religion show the opposite.

For those who question whether these correlations really imply causality, path-breaking research by Rebecca Shah and others uncovers some of the most intriguing causal mechanisms and pathways that operate with religious agency. This research shows the empowerment that comes from spiritual capital and supportive religious networks, along with the capacity to exercise religious voice, choice, and exit.

A former World Bank development economist, Rebecca Shah anchors her work in behavioral economics on the importance of such attributes as dignity, agency, hope for the future, and self-control in the uplift of the very poor. Amartya Sen demonstrates, for example, that poverty alleviation hinges not only on material factors, but on the capacities of the poor to make choices and the freedom to act on what they value.[22] To a surprising extent, the poor not only value material assets or education, but relationships with family and community, growth in their faith, and harmony with the transcendent.[23] These values or aspirations can facilitate the social capital that we know facilitates cooperative enterprises, access to credit markets, and economic development. But Shah and others also point to the ways that religious participation also generates *spiritual capital*, which can buoy uplift and the broader inclusion of the poor and marginalized. As Shaw observes, spiritual capital is "generated through attitudes and perceptions of people toward themselves", particularly through a sense of agency before God "to improve their lives, the lives of their families and the lives of the wider community".[24] To the extent that spiritual awakening can promote a positive, even transcendent, sense of oneself and one's agency, it provides a source of hope and future-orientation essential to take advantage of development initiatives, such as micro-loans, training programs, craft guilds, and the like.

Freedom to practice one's faith, thus, can be central to economic development and inclusion because of the debilitating impact of extreme poverty. Caught in a vicious cycle of desperation and hopelessness, the poor often indulge in self-destructive activities or give up entirely. Religious agency, on the other hand, can supply a sense of hope, as well as cultivate attributes of thrift and planning essential to breaking free from the poverty cycle.

How do we know this? Shah and her research teams have followed the trajectories of thousands of poor women in Asia and Africa, with a special emphasis on India and now Sri Lanka. From this ongoing research Shah concludes that spiritual capital is indeed a "fungible resource" that is "accumulated in the religious domain by specifically religious means, but which can be 'spent' or leveraged to advance non-religious domains like governance and the economy".[25] Surprisingly, Shah finds that the practice of religious tithing not only can help build social networks of mutual support, but that it helps foster a culture of self-discipline and future-orientation. She points to Muslim Dalit women, whose visits (and tiny contributions) to Sufi dargah shrines empower them with a sense of hope and agency. Crucial to this empowerment is the freedom to make one's religious decisions, which is vulnerable to theocratic pressures, whether from Islamist Sunni clerics or Hindu nationalists who reject such choices.[26]

To explore the causal pathways of exclusion and inclusion, Rebecca Shah focused her research among Dalit women involved in microenterprise. Indian Dalits comprise one of the largest discrete classes of people in the world subject to systematic exclusion, and Dalit women are doubly marginalized. The term Dalit literally means "broken" and is used to describe those traditionally regarded as untouchable or outcast in the Hindu caste system. Referred to as "scheduled castes" by the Indian government, they comprise at least 200 million people (or over 16% of India), but Dalit advocates estimate a much higher figure.[27]

In light of their exclusion from broader Indian or Hindu society, religious switching for Dalits can serve as a potent form of agency, and large numbers have become Buddhists, Muslims, or Christians. Quite by accident, Rebecca Shah's research on Dalit women unearthed a large sample who were converting from Hinduism to other faiths, particularly revivalist Christianity. This enabled her to conduct a fine-grained comparison of these women to their peers in the same slums, and thus to track the impact of religious choice on economic betterment.

The results were dramatic. The ability to *break free and break out* of cultural and legal straitjackets – to exercise religious choice and agency – spurred these women to take initiative in other aspects of their lives. They were more likely to take part in micro-enterprises and be successful in them, more likely to report domestic abuse, more likely to invest in their children's education, and more likely to save and eventually own their homes. Participation in face-to-face religious communities also gave them access to networks of mutual support and accountability that yielded significant economic and social benefits. Notably, Shah finds these impacts especially strong for Christian converts, whose identities are transformed by the Christian idea of their transcendent worth and dignity. As a deeply marginalized group, Dalits have even developed their own empowering theology by identifying Christ on the cross as literally one of them, a Dalit, a broken one.[28]

These findings suggest that the *nature* of religious belief, especially theologies of hope versus fatalism, could magnify the impact of religious agency on economic uplift and women's empowerment. This hypothesis is guiding different experimental research projects. One team, for example, conducted a spiritually-based intervention among 600 indigenous women who were part of a faith-based microfinance program in Oaxaca, Mexico. Based on prior research showing that dimensions of hope facilitate transitions out of poverty, researchers randomly placed participants in control and intervention groups. The intervention group was engaged with a biblically-based curriculum that emphasized hope and agency – having goals and aspirations, recognizing gifts and abilities, and conceptualizing pathways out of poverty. The study found that evangelical Protestant women already enjoyed higher levels of aspirations, agency, and optimism at baseline, but that the intervention significantly enhanced these attributes among Catholic women, narrowing their differences with their evangelical sisters.[29]

In turn, Rebecca Shah is teaming up with colleague Robert Woodberry to undertake an even more ambitious project. Funded by the John Templeton Foundation and sponsored by Baylor University's Institute for Studies of Religion, *The Religion and Economic Empowerment Project* will test the impact of religiously-based hope and agency on poverty alleviation. The study now underway will involve household surveys of some 9,000 people in different sites in India and Sri Lanka over time, including oversamples of Dalit and tribal women. Employing a rigorous methodology of quasi-experimental controls (places where conversion is allowed and where it is not), the study will track the longitudinal impacts of conversion (especially to different forms of Christianity) on poverty alleviation.[30]

This cutting-edge research on women's empowerment and faith underscores the value of religious freedom – understood as full equality before the law, the right of exit and voice, associational rights, and social dignity. Expanding religious agency cultivates moral and social capital, unleashes economic enterprise, and spurs uplift of the poor in traditional societies. These empirical findings also call into question the fashionable valorization by some western scholars of fixed indigenous religious identities, and the attendant criticism of conversion as a transitive act, rather than a potentially liberating one.

The broader significance of this line of research is in its documentation of the importance of recognizing religious choice and pluralism. Where states or societies restrict the right of religious change, they unintentionally undercut the kind of agency that choice can propel. In contrast, when poor and marginalized women can exercise their agency in religion – making their own religious choices, cultivating their own religious communities, reforming or challenging interpretations of their religion that oppress them, or changing their religion – this freedom unleashes their agency in broader economic and social realms of life.

### **Religion and Social Inclusion of Guest Workers, Migrants, and Refugees**

Great migrations are a powerful feature of our global era, whether through refugee flows, legal immigration, or guest worker arrangements. Migrants often suffer various degrees of social and economic exclusion, leading Pope Francis to call upon global leaders to seek means of authentic inclusion for the millions living on the margins of host societies. Greatly compounding exclusion is the fact that so many migrants are religious "others", perceived as alien to dominant cultures and thus subject to restrictions, discrimination, and social hostilities. Government protections of religious freedom and social acceptance of diverse religious identities provide crucial leverage for inclusion of newcomers. On the other hand, the denial of religious rights reinforces exclusion.

Saudi Arabia provides a vivid example. Guest workers comprise a significant percentage of the Saudi population (some 20-30%), and most are not adherents of its austere Wahhabi form of Sunni Islam. Christian worship is illegal and other religious minorities face severe religious restrictions. The appalling exploitation guest workers often experience, therefore, is compounded by the religious exclusion they face. Religious observance often must take place in secret, thus the denial of the right of corporate worship and fraternal organization atomizes guest workers and prevents empowering solidarity.

The social exclusion of “religious others” can also operate in more benign national contexts. Japan is a democratic nation with legal protections for religious freedom. But guest workers, because they are viewed as alien to Japanese culture, continue to be marginalized and excluded in significant ways. A broader social acceptance of religious pluralism would aid in inclusion of these workers.[31] The struggle of the Turkish minority in Germany illustrates this dynamic as well. While multi-generational Turkish families have lived in Germany for decades, it was not until this century that German law provided avenues for their inclusion as citizens. The identity of Turks as cultural and religious “others” proved a barrier to this change in law and social recognition. In sum, to have one’s religious identity recognized and validated by a host country serves to open up avenues of inclusion hitherto closed.

The flood of refugees from Syria and Afghanistan, themselves the victims of religious repression and strife, represents the greatest refugee crisis since the end of the Second World War. This influx of mostly Muslim refugees is driving a new politics of nativist nationalism in the West, with huge implications for questions of inclusion and national identity. Moreover, it appears that the growth of Muslim immigration in Europe and North America is leading to an increase in both government restrictions and social hostilities. According to the latest Pew restrictions report, “government harassment and use of force against religious groups” has surged “as record number of refugees enter Europe”, which recorded largest increase in religious restrictions in the world in 2015. But the report also recorded increases in government restrictions in the United States, mostly in local zoning resistance to mosque construction, as well as growing social hostilities.[32] On the other hand, restive Muslim minorities in Europe seem to be driving some of the increases in anti-Semitic assaults and terrorist incidents. Clearly, western nations face dramatic new challenges to the vision of inclusive society.

### **Religious Agency, Civil Society, and Democracy**

In a prior paper for the Pontifical Academy, I analyzed in detail how religious restrictions and persecution undermine sustainable democracy and pluralism. I noted how declines in democratic freedom track closely with rising religious restrictions.[33] That trend has continued. After three decades of solid progress, democratic freedom in the world reached a high point in 1998. It then stagnated and, ominously, has declined for nearly two decades, the longest decline in the 40-year history of Freedom House reporting.[34]

Central to this dynamic have been efforts by governments or dominant social groups to restrict religious civil society. We see this with the contemporary slide of Russia to authoritarianism, which began with the 1997 religion law that empowered the state to restrict civil society freedom of competitors to the Orthodox Church. Putin has often cloaked his authoritarian moves under the mantle defending Christian Orthodoxy, the latest example of which involved the banning of Jehovah’s Witnesses, which will serve to further marginalize this vulnerable group. The Arab Uprising left few democracies and enormous religious turmoil in its wake in part to the weakness of civil society and the power of Islamist groups to exploit democratic openings. The absence of protection for vulnerable minorities and religious dissidents during transitions emboldened radical movements and produced stillborn democracies. To be sure, some of the conditions for democratic consolidation do not involve religion per se, such as an independent judiciary. Nonetheless, religious freedom powerfully serves and reinforces democracy by promoting the inclusion of diverse religious minorities in civil society.

One of the most helpful frameworks for understanding the relationship between religion and the state is Alfred Stepan’s “Twin Tolerations” thesis. Inclusive liberal democracy, he finds, depends on a reciprocal bargain between the institutions of religion and the institutions of the state. The state protects and thus “tolerates” the freedom of religious institutions to operate in civil society; those religious institutions, in turn, refrain from using the powers of the state to enhance their prerogatives and thus agree to “tolerate” (not squelch or marginalize) religious minorities and competitors.[35]

Taking the twin tolerations as his point of departure, Notre Dame Political Scientist Daniel Philpott developed a cogent theory of the link between religion-state relations, theology, and democracy. Democracy and civil society are best anchored where religion and state are differentiated, not fused, and where the “political theology” of religious actors eschews constitutional privileges or coercive state enforcement of doctrine.[36]

The global impact of Vatican II dramatically illustrates this theory. Before the Second Vatican Council the Church often sought prerogatives of state establishment and thus resisted civil society agency by competitors. This often led the Church to support authoritarian regimes, which were happy to grant the Church prerogatives in return for reciprocal legitimacy.[37] As Philpott shows, the Church’s proclamation on religious freedom in *Dignitatis Humanae* provided a natural experiment of the impact of this theological change. Before *Dignitatis* the majority of Catholic countries were authoritarian. After the Church’s embrace of religious freedom, its leaders were freed to challenge the legitimacy of authoritarian regimes, and with a few exceptions most did just that, producing the last great wave of democratization on earth.[38] Moreover, even in countries with a minority of Catholics, such as South Korea and Taiwan, Catholic leaders played a leading role in the democratization

process. The autonomy of the Church from state control, combined with a political theology that championed religious freedom for all, enhanced independent civil society and propelled democratization.[39]

As one of the principle scholars documenting the Catholic theological transformation on religious freedom, Philpott has turned his attention to the resources within Islam for a similar evolution.[40] According to Pew Research Center documentation, Muslim-majority countries, especially in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region, record the highest religious restrictions in the world.[41] This pattern has led some to suggest that Islamic theology, particularly the prohibition on exit, is inherently inimical to religious pluralism, independent civil society, and inclusion of religious minorities. It is indeed the case that apostasy and blasphemy laws serve to intimidate and marginalize religious minorities, women, and reform voices within Islam.

But Philpott observes seeds of freedom in the Muslim world. For example, roughly one fourth of the Muslim-majority countries are in fact “religiously free”. So the problem is not Islam per se. Second, among those Muslim-majority countries that are not religiously free, there are two patterns of regimes. One is “secular repressive”, meaning that the regime wishes to privatize Islam in order to become a modern state. The other is “religiously repressive”, implying an Islamist government that poses a harsh version of *sharia*. Secular repressive states show that the reason for the lack of religious freedom in the Muslim world is not simply Islam, while religiously-free states demonstrate the possibility of religious freedom in Islam. There are other seeds of freedom in Islam: certain verses in the Quran; certain features of the life of Mohammad; the appearance of liberal Islam in the 19th and 20th centuries; and a growing number of present day Muslim jurists and intellectuals who favor religious freedom.[42]

With this analysis in mind, Philpott explores the Arab Uprisings that began in 2010. He argues that the fate of these uprisings – most of which were a loss for religious freedom but one of which, Tunisia, was a gain – can be understood in terms of the interplay between forces of religious freedom, secular repression, and religious repression. His book in progress also shows that the weakness of religious freedom factions helps account for the broad failure of democracy in the Arab Spring, while the relative strength of the forces backing religious freedom helps account for its advance in Tunisia.[43]

### **Repression of Religious Civil Society in Authoritarian and Hybrid Regimes**

While Grim, Philpott, and others correlate the powerful relationship between religious freedom and democracy, new research is also probing the nature of religion in authoritarian or hybrid regimes. Here we see how mainstream scholars of comparative politics and regime types are applying modern methodologies and global data to religious questions. The picture that emerges is one of tremendous complexity and variation. This owes to the fact that authoritarian regimes employ diverse strategies of co-opting dominant religious groups for legitimacy or restricting all religious groups to contain emerging civil society. Religious communities, in turn, develop a variety of adaptive strategies to survive within authoritarian contexts. Two of the most important scholars helping us to understand these relationships are Karrie Koesel, political scientist at Notre Dame University, and Ani Sarkissian, political scientist at Michigan State University.

A scholar with expertise in both Russia and China, Koesel explores the complex relationships between growing religious movements and post-Communist regimes. Koesel notes that in these regimes religion and the state can represent competing centers of authority, so in the quest for popular legitimacy authoritarian leaders may attempt to co-opt religious leaders and institutions to enhance their base of support, as we see with Putin’s Russia. But they may also strive to restrict or regulate religion to prevent the emergence of an opposition civil society sector, as we see in China.

In exploring the diverse and contingent relationships between religion and the authoritarian state, Koesel finds that both Moscow and Beijing initially created a more hospitable environment for religious expression in the restructuring periods of the 1980s and 1990s, while also maintaining control over religious actors. But as religious revival grew in size and diversity, the regimes saw the need to retighten control over religion. While both regimes employ national strategies to contain religious civil society, they defer much regulation to local discretion, with often vague and contradictory national laws.[44] Thus religious groups often find themselves bargaining with local governments to maintain Church property and greater autonomy of operation. This can provide some religious groups with the incentive to help prop up a repressive state even while other religious groups find themselves in increasing opposition. The value of Koesel’s nuanced analysis suggests that the full flowering of religious freedom can propel civil society and democratization, rather than the specific decisions of religious actors.

An analysis of more diverse authoritarian regimes is provided by Ani Sarkissian. In *The Varieties of Religious Repression: Why Governments Restrict Religion*, she probes how authoritarian regimes view religious organizations and how and why they target religious civil society as a means of gaining or remaining in power. Approaching religious freedom through her focus on democratization, Sarkissian argues that the degree of



religious repression in a state –necessarily linked to civil society capacity – is a more accurate measure of the level of authoritarianism present in that state than is the presence of free or fair elections. Until recently, for example, Turkey held relatively free elections but should not be viewed as a fair democracy as it continually represses all religions except for the majority population of Sunni Muslims. Rather than measuring the quality of elections, Sarkissian argues that “democracy-promotion programs” should “emphasize religious freedom as an aspect of good-governance”. Consequently, “those who develop foreign policy can pay closer attention to the types of religious repression...as an indicator of the potential for more violent religious persecution and conflict in the future”.<sup>[45]</sup> Sarkissian poses her work, therefore, not only as a new means to understanding authoritarianism but as a scale with which to predict future conflict or relative improvement in civil society’s freedom.

Sarkissian’s broad theme is how authoritarian regimes target religious civil society “as a means of restricting political competition and extending nondemocratic rule”.<sup>[46]</sup> One of the most common means of targeting civil society, Sarkissian finds, is restrictions on the right to proselytize – in the interest of supporting the dominant religion. The right to proselytize is one of the more controversial dimensions of religious freedom. A basic definition of proselytization is the process of trying to persuade another individual to change his or her religion. But popular usage has given the term negative connotations, as it is often thought of as incentivized or coerced attempts at conversion. Yet proselytization can take many forms, and debates about the status of proselytization among other religious freedoms exist in international law, within individual states, among scholars, and within religious traditions.

Sarkissian’s research approaches the issue empirically, using data from the Religion and State Database (RAS2) from 1990 to 2008 for 161 countries.<sup>[47]</sup> She tests whether restrictions on proselytization affect the protection of religious freedom in general, as well as whether these restrictions have larger impacts on civil liberties not related to religion (using the Freedom House Civil Liberties index). Employing multiple regression analysis with a number of controls, she finds that that state restrictions on proselytization are a strong predictor of increased restrictions on religion, especially against religious minorities. Proselytization restrictions are also associated with greater restrictions on civil liberties more generally, even when controlling for other factors that explain state repression. These findings lead to the conclusion that when considered as an empirical issue, proselytization rights do belong among the larger categories of both religious and civil liberties, and are perhaps less controversial than debates around them suggest.<sup>[48]</sup>

Having each written major books on religious restrictions in authoritarian regimes, Koesel and Sarkissian have teamed up to examine religious relationships with what they call hybrid regimes. Hybrid regimes – political systems that combine democratic institutions with autocratic practices – are increasingly common across the world and have proven to be durable political systems. Koesel and Sarkissian examine the nature of religious freedom in 50 hybrid regimes. This research serves two main purposes. First, it describes the status of religious freedom in hybrid regimes, showing that these countries vary widely in how much they restrict and regulate religion. Intriguingly, hybrid regimes tend to protect religious groups on paper, but often engage in a number of informal restrictive practices, such as favoring one religion over others and overlooking violence against religious minorities. Hybrid regimes are also more likely not to intervene in cases of discrimination or abuse against religious minorities, and are more likely to denounce one or more groups as dangerous “cults” or “sects.” This tendency points to a pattern of selective targeting and favoritism, which marginalizes particular communities.<sup>[49]</sup>

When Koesel and Sarkissian examine data on restrictions on civil society they find evidence that governments are engaging in preemptive repression of independent groups in society to prevent opposition from mobilizing. They also find that hybrid regimes which exclude religious groups from the electoral arena (by banning religious political parties) tend to restrict religious freedoms more than those that allow for some religious competition in politics. The broader implication of their work is that gauging the extent of repression of religious civil society may be one of the best predictors of the potential for further democratization of a hybrid regime.<sup>[50]</sup>

### **The Locust Effect: Religious Restrictions, Violence, Conflict, and Terrorism**

In his book, *The Locust Effect: Why the End of Poverty Requires the End of Violence*, Gary Haugen, President of the International Justice Mission (IJM), describes the origins and nature of violence that pervades the lives of many of the world’s impoverished people, keeping them marginalized. Seared by the experience of investigating the Rwanda genocide, Haugen developed a global initiative to address the lack of justice for victims of violent exploitation, trafficking, and expropriation of property. His advocacy and research led him to conclude that widespread violence against the poor, rooted in the impunity of the victimizers, constituted one of the greatest barriers to their uplift and broader inclusion in social and political life. He likens this phenomenon to a plague of locusts that devour ripe fields just before harvest. Agricultural development

initiatives or microenterprise projects may be taking root in a developing society, but these can be wiped out by “locusts of predatory violence” that “lay waste to all that the vulnerable poor had otherwise struggled to scrape together to secure their lives”.[51] The lack of avenues in many developing societies for legal recourse, he shows, creates an environment of impunity that emboldens those who would enslave or steal from the poor.

As Haugen and his team show, the poor’s endemic vulnerability to violence results in massive sexual exploitation, force labor, illegal detention, land theft, assault, and police abuse. Such violent exploitation endures because victimizers have little reason to fear legal retribution in inadequate or corrupt justice systems. [52] This finding itself should be incorporated into the Academy’s reflections on marginalization and exclusion.

But there is an analogous phenomenon in religious repression. A formidable scholarship shows that apostasy and blasphemy statutes or anti-conversion laws, often passed by pressure from dominant religious groups, serve to intimidate and marginalize religious minorities and women. The mere accusation of apostasy, blasphemy, or conversion can spark mob violence against marginalized minority communities, resulting in massive loss of life and destruction of property. Often local government authorities look the other way or fail to prosecute leaders of these orchestrated assaults. In Pakistan the victims are often Christians or Ahmadis; in India, Christians and Muslims; in Sri Lanka, Hindus.[53]

Religious repression by states and social actors, acting with impunity, also fuels a disproportionate number of violent conflicts, civil wars, and terrorist incidents in the contemporary era. Here, too, we see a locust effect.

A valuable framework for understanding the causal link between restrictions on religious freedom and violence emerges from two complementary works: *The Price of Freedom Denied* by Grim and Finke and *God’s Century* by Toft, Philpott, and Shah. Drawing upon global data, Grim and Finke employ structural equation modeling to demonstrate statistically the powerful causal link between religious restrictions and violent persecution, which destabilizes societies and spills over borders.[54] Toft, Philpott, and Shaw, similarly, show that repressive actions by states and societal actors nurture and propel the militant political theologies that represent a key source of violence and conflict in the globe today. The most dramatic instances of such conflicts are religious civil wars that, in their devastation of the economic and civic fabric of societies, vividly illustrate the locust effect. As Toft *et al.* document, religious civil wars are especially brutish and intractable, more lethal and harder to end, and they represent a growing reality on the global stage. In the 1940s religious civil wars constituted just 19% of all such conflicts. That proportion increased to 36% in the 1970s; 45% in the 1990s, and 50% in the first decades of the 21st century.[55]

The ideological and strategic dimensions of religious conflict serve as the focus of research by William Inboden. Having served in the U.S. State Department and National Security Council, Inboden, now at the University of Texas at Austin, has investigated the origins and ideological nature of threats to global peace and security. What he finds is that the “actors with the most egregious religious-freedom violations are remarkably consonant” with those that threaten the peace and security of neighbors and the wider world. This holds for numerous smaller scale military interventions as well as large-scale wars. Moreover, the ideologies behind security threats to free societies, from Communism and fascism in the 20th century to transnational jihadist movements today, contain in their *core identity* a profound hostility to religious pluralism or religion itself. Indeed, Inboden found that whether the security threat came from superpowers, global ideological movements, or failed states, the single characteristic they all shared “was an abiding hostility” to religious freedom and pluralism.[56]

Inboden also focused his research into the self-professed ideology of violent Islamist movements, one of the singular sources of strife in the world today. Taking seriously the self-proclaimed theology of the disparate groups – Al Qaeda, Al Shabab, Laskar-e-Taiba, Boko Haram, the Taliban, and ISIS – he finds a common denominator in their hostility to religious pluralism. Indeed, religious intolerance and opposition to religious freedom are the “defining epistemic features of jihadism”, central to their animating identity. Because jihadism regards religious pluralism as anathema, enforcing a single vision of right religion justifies its violence and repression, not only against non-Muslims but also Muslims who refuse to embrace its monistic ideology. Inboden shows how the Islamic State’s “orgy of violence emanates not just from bloodlust, but from its abiding theological commitment” to eradicating all other faiths or contrary interpretations of Islam. The genocidal campaign of murder, rape, enslavement, and displacement against the Yazidis, an especially devastating case of the locust effect, represented a logical outgrowth of the theological worldview of ISIS.[57]

The links between protections for religious freedom, religious pluralism, and democracy, as Inboden shows, explain why “jihadism self-consciously posits itself as an ideological rival to liberal democracy”, in the direct lineage of totalitarian movements of the 20th century. Democracy’s protection of religious pluralism makes it anathema.[58]

One lesson Inboden draws from this analysis is that advocates of more inclusive societies, both within Islamic societies and outside, should focus on protection of religious freedom and pluralism as antidotes to jihadism. Indeed, protection of religious exercise and pluralism can be seen “as the first seeds of democracy”.[59]

This brings us to the pivotal recent work of Nilay Saiya, assistant professor of international studies at SUNY-Brockport. Saiya’s work demonstrates how scholars today can capitalize on an unprecedented wealth of global data to reveal the deeper links between religious liberty and peaceful flourishing societies. Focusing on “religious terrorism” as a uniquely destabilizing force in the world today, Saiya analyzes patterns from the *Global Terrorism Database*, the *Pew Global Restrictions* reports, and *Polity* scores on democracy. He finds that religious violence, whether from Islamic, Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, or Jewish actors, arises from states and societies that repress religious exercise. Indeed, religiously-unfree countries experienced more than 13 times as many religious terrorist attacks than religiously-free states. And the relationship is remarkably linear; as the level of religious restrictions goes up so too does incidence of terrorism and violence. In the post-Cold War era, religiously-repressive states were the targets of 69% of religious terrorist attacks, moderately restrictive states 24%, and religiously-free states only 7%. Moreover, the vast majority of international terrorist groups (88%) originated from religiously-repressive states.[60]

Because religious violence is more ruthless and resilient than other forms, as Saiya shows, it represents one of the most serious threats to peace within nations and internationally. Indeed, Saiya’s examination of the history of interstate war finds that “no dyad of religiously-free states has ever fought on opposing sides during an interstate war”.[61] Saiya also cites other research that documents how “states characterized by high levels of religious discrimination against ethnoreligious minorities were more likely to initiate or become involved in foreign crises with other states, even controlling for democracy”.[62] Since the poor, marginalized women, and ethnic minorities are the most vulnerable to the devastating impact of war, violence, and instability, they have an enormous stakes in systems of greater religious toleration and freedom.[63]

Saiya’s empirical analysis elaborates on the specific “pathways to peace” paved by religious liberty:

- 1) When people can practice their faith free of government restrictions and social hostilities, religious violence goes down.
- 2) Religious liberty frees people to provide social services and channels their energies in civil society participation.
- 3) Free exercise of religion works against authoritarianism and tyranny by limiting state reach and lowering the stakes of seizing political power.
- 4) Religious freedom fosters an open marketplace of ideas that promotes diversity of views within and between religions. Restrictive environments facilitate radical theologies; religiously free societies enable people to question and reform their faith, preventing radical voices to dominate the discourse.

Saiya concludes that religious liberty is a “weapon of peace” to combat terrorism and interstate conflict. His rigorous statistical modeling shows that “religiously free countries” have far lower religious violence at home, less propensity to export violence abroad, and more peaceful relations with other nations. Strikingly, he finds that the powerful inverse relationship between religious freedom and terrorism remains even when *controlling for democracy*. In other words, because not all democracies guarantee equal religious rights, religious freedom uniquely lowers terrorism by undercutting the militancy and grievances that propel such intractable violence. Thus while Immanuel Kant posited a “democratic peace”, it appears that in the 21st century our hope lies even more in “*the religious freedom peace*”.[64]

In sum, mounting scholarship demonstrates that religiously repressive governments and societies, along with fragile states that cannot protect religious freedom rights, are incubators of radical theologies and militant movements that produce national and transnational violence. Such environments embolden majority communities to repress minorities and harass dissenters, which undercuts inclusion. Repressive contexts produce insurgent groups and radicalize those repressed. Thus religious freedom works on multiple levels. It moderates majority communities and allows multi-vocal expressions of the majority faith. It provides peaceful avenues for participation and inclusion by minorities and undercuts that source of militancy. By giving all a stake in the pluralist fabric of society, it cultivates inter-religious interactions and amity. It is a weapon of peace and inclusion.

### **Concluding Reflections on Christianity, Freedom, and Inclusion**

In our Academy’s exploration of social and cultural inclusion, it is vital to note that many Christian minorities around the world suffer marginalization, harassment, discrimination, violence, and martyrdom. Indeed, successive global reports by the Pew Research Center document that more Christians – in more

diverse settings – experience government repression or social hostilities than any other religious group.[65] Demographer Todd Johnson estimates that about 500 million Christians (or 22% of the global faithful) live in states in which they are subject to persecution.[66] Moreover, the concentration of these Christians in repressive societies blinds more comfortable Christians from their plight. A recent global investigation finds that in some 60 nations fully 80% of all acts of religious discrimination are directed toward Christians.[67] From a mere numerical and human rights standpoint, this marginalization deserves our attention.

But there is another reason for us to ponder the fate of Christian communities. As Timothy Shah and I discovered in producing two edited volumes on *Christianity and Freedom*,[68] the untold story of the last two millennia – and today – is the pivotal and outsized role of Christianity in nurturing ideas and practices conducive to inclusive societies.

At the heart of the Christian DNA is the view that all are stamped with *Imago Dei* and thus endowed with surpassing worth and dignity. God's love, manifested in the incarnational suffering and sacrificial death of the son, embodies this idea of the equal dignity and value of all people, including – or especially – the lowly and the outcast. As taught in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, Christians must also radically reimagine "neighbor" as the hurting, the needy. One of the most stunning findings of our project is how this vision of human dignity shaped early Christian critiques of slavery, sexual exploitation, and poverty in the Roman Empire, and how it continues to do so in modern manifestations of these scourges. Across the contemporary globe Christian minorities and transnational Christian networks play an outsized role in campaigns against human trafficking, sexual coercion, slavery, poverty, illiteracy, religious persecution, exploitation, and violence. In other words, across time and space Christianity carries a powerful theological conception that, properly nurtured, promotes inclusion of the marginalized. North Koreans fleeing across the border to China, for example, learn to "look for the cross" because Chinese Christians, themselves vulnerable to harassment, will provide safe haven.[69]

Another crucial aspect of Christianity concerns ultimate authority. While Christianity counsels lawfulness and proper obedience to governing authorities, it teaches that the faithful owe allegiance to an authority higher than the state. This understanding necessitates limits on state power. Moreover, Christian faith is lived in community. Thus the Church must have the freedom to operate according to mandates from God. Our historical excavation demonstrates how this understanding and its practical application in the doctrine of *libertas ecclesiae* – the freedom of the Church – exerted real pressure on regimes and carved space for insipient civil society. Our contemporary chapters, in turn, demonstrate how this Christian nurture of civil society operates in nations as diverse as Nigeria, Egypt, Pakistan, Vietnam, China, or Indonesia.

Because one's assent to the divine must be freely given to be genuine, as early Church fathers asserted, it cannot be coerced. The radically innovative idea of religious liberty – *libertatem religionis* – was developed in the early years of the Church by Tertullian and Lactantius, who saw themselves faithfully living out the message of Jesus and the teachings of St. Paul. While acknowledging and explaining tragic instances when Christian leaders failed to uphold this insight, our sponsored research demonstrates the historical continuity and contemporary power of the assertion of the freedom of conscience and religion in Christian teaching and practice. The quest to live by transcendent mandates of conscience has played a pivotal role in the development of ideas and legal protections of religious liberty. As our volumes show, the innovative doctrine of religious liberty, without precedent in the ancient world, bubbled up from the early Church, flowed through the medieval period, widened among Protestant dissenters in Europe and the colonies, nourished the founding document of the new American nation, and then swept across the globe in the great Catholic wave of democratization.

Because of the pluralism inherent Christian life, and the temptation to employ the sword of the state to enforce doctrine, this right was often most vigorously asserted by Christian dissenters from state churches. Today we see religious liberty most acutely embraced where the faith represents an embattled minority, as it is in many parts of the world.

A genuine innovation in religious affairs, which our project illuminates, is the insight that the fusion of state and religious authorities corrupts or compromises the core message of the faith and thus dilutes its leavening role as an agent of free societies. Independence from the state, which Christian communities increasingly assert across the globe, helps to preserve this salvific message and its societal impact. Independence from state authorities, moreover, has freed Churches to play a powerful role in several waves of global democratization, and has spawned a robust network of Christian outreach in development, education, peace-making, justice, and human rights causes.

While a number of studies have examined the parlous status of many Christian communities around the world, we sought to understand their role as agents in leavening their societies, defending human rights, promoting democracy, preserving a pluralist social fabric, generating economic uplift, supporting literacy, and provisioning vital health and welfare services. This illuminates what will be lost if these communities are marginalized or vanish – why, in other words, even non-Christians should care. The vanishing of Christianity in the Middle East,

for example, would alter the pluralist character of the region and imperil the fate of other religious and ethnic minorities, women, Muslim intellectuals, and political dissidents.

Finally, we discovered that the very *association of Christianity with freedom* is what often sparks harassment and persecution by state and societal actors hostile to such freedoms. In this sense, our project turns the Enlightenment narrative on its head and provides a compelling rationale for why public authorities, opinion leaders, and votaries of inclusive free societies must rise to the challenge of religious persecution in the 21st century.

[1] University of Oklahoma.

[1] This project was begun under the auspices of the Religious Freedom Project (RFP) at Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs and made possible by the support of the John Templeton Foundation. Continued support for this work is being offered by the RFP's successor project, the Religious Freedom Research Project at the Berkley Center. My involvement has included co-directing the Christianity and Freedom initiative (*Christianity and Freedom, Volume I: Historical Perspectives* and *Christianity and Freedom, Vol. II: Contemporary Perspectives*, co-edited by Timothy Samuel Shah and Allen D. Hertzke, New York: Cambridge University Press), and synthesizing the research of a dozen team members exploring the economic and political benefits of religious freedom (in progress).

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