

Bonner Querschnitte

Bonn Profiles – Press Reports

Phone: +49 4106 804806 • Fax: +49 4106 804807
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BQ 914 – No. 19/2026

Anthology on theological perspectives on religious persecution launched at FIUC in Oslo

(Bonn, 24.03.2026) The launch of the anthology took place during the symposium “Religious Persecution and Theological/Missiological Education” at Fjellhaug International University College (FIUC) in Oslo, co-organized with the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF). The event grew out of FIUC’s research project “Religious Freedom and Religious Persecution” and was one of three major research conferences feeding into a new anthology, which explores theological doctrine of persecution and missional practice. The anthology was presented by the two editors Prof. Dr. Robert Lilleaasen and Prof. Dr. Christof Sauer in the presence of the German publisher Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirmmacher from Culture and Science Publ. (VKW) and most of the authors. The anthology examines the theological and missiological dimensions of religious persecution. “Religious Persecution: Perspectives from Theology and Missiology” is available in print and available for free download.



VKW book launch “Religious Persecution” Fjellhaug International University College in Oslo

Edited by Professor Robert Lilleaasen and Professor Christof Sauer, the anthology brings together contributions from scholars representing nine countries. Essays address persecution through biblical studies, church history, systematic and practical theology, missiology, and legal scholarship, offering what the editors describe as “a rich array of mainly original research findings.”

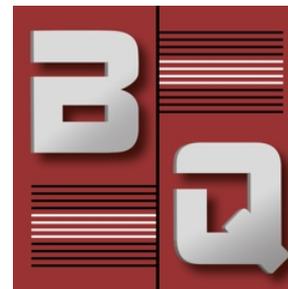
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Titus Vogt (ViSdP)
Vorderer Kamp 52a, 25479 Ellerau
Tel.: +49 / 4106 / 80 48 06
Fax: +49 / 4106 / 80 48 07
E-Mail: Titus.Vogt@bucer.de



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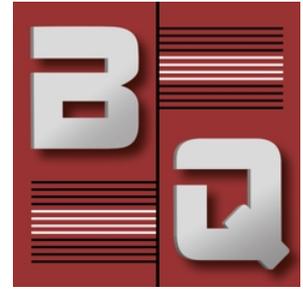
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centuries. “Theology and mission are not developed in a vacuum—they are forged in the lived experiences of believers, including those who suffer for their faith,” the book’s introduction states. The collection is intended for students, pastors, missionaries, and academics seeking nuanced engagement with persecution in both historical and contemporary contexts.

The volume is a direct outcome of the “Religious Freedom and Religious Persecution” research project launched by Fjellhaug International University College in 2019. The initiative was designed to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration among theologians, missiologists, and related specialists. It has hosted three research symposiums—in 2021, 2023 and 2025—which served as the primary source for many of the book’s chapters.

In the opening section on definitions, German persecution studies expert Sauer and South African legal scholar Werner Nel provide an extensive survey of how persecution is defined in legal, sociological, and theological contexts. They argue for reflective and precise use of terminology, offering their own sociological definition alongside scales and spectrums employed by NGOs and Christian agencies.

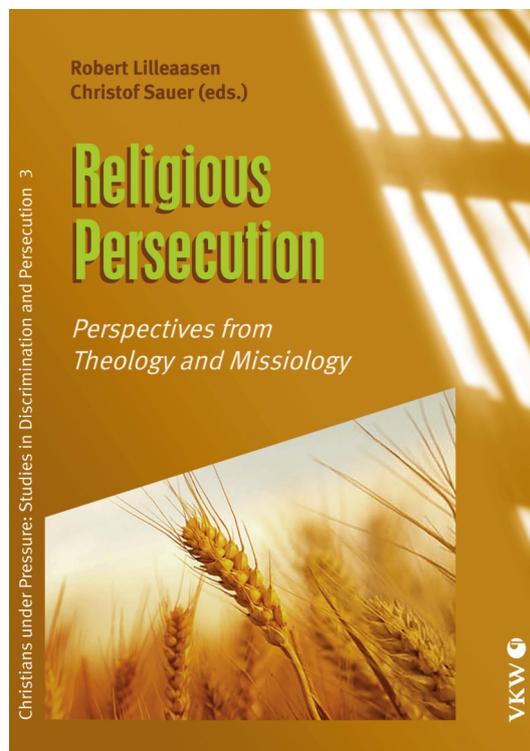
Biblical studies contributions include Norwegian Old Testament scholar Håkon Sunde Pedersen’s exploration of zeal and violence in the figures of Phinehas, Elijah, and Jehu, and Belgian scholar Geert W. Lorein’s examination of the Maccabees’ resistance to Antiochus IV Epiphanes. German-Swiss scholar Daniel Röthlisberger analyzes New Testament language about persecution, while German New Testament scholar Christoph Stenschke identifies patterns of both conflict and cooperation in the Book of Acts. Norwegian scholar Håkon Leite examines Paul’s view of suffering in the Pastoral Epistles, challenging readings that downplay its eschatological importance.

Historical and systematic theology studies include German church historian Klaus Wetzels survey of Christian responses to persecution from antiquity to Pietism, Danish scholar Finn Aa. Rønne’s account of reform movements within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, and Sauer’s review of the 2009 Bad Urach Statement on suffering and martyrdom. Iranian-born scholar Sara Afshari develops a theology of persecution using the metaphor of Holy Saturday, while Czech scholars Věra Miláčková and Kamila Veverková examine theological reasons for fleeing persecution.

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Practical theology contributions address pastoral care and congregational dynamics in persecuted contexts. Danish scholar Henrik Nymann Eriksen outlines the pastoral, mentoring, and prophetic roles of ministers supporting Christian converts facing repatriation to Muslim-majority countries. Lilleaasen contributes a study on “courageous followership” in churches under pressure, while Norwegian scholar Tonje Belibi analyzes how Norwegian Sunday school curricula portray persecution. Knut Kåre Kirkholm assesses how Lutheran preachers in Norway address the topic from the pulpit.

Missiology and religious studies chapters explore how persecution intersects with conversion, contextualization, and interfaith dynamics. German scholar Joel Hofer examines the relationship between conversion to Christianity and persecution; Meiken Buchholz discusses the “sinicisation” of religion in China; Norwegian scholar Frank Ole Thoresen surveys minority experiences of tolerance in Tunisia; and American scholar James Bultema analyzes perceptions of the Turkish Protestant movement.

In the final applied theology section, Afshari reflects critically on how Christian gatherings frame persecution, warning against reducing it to an emotional appeal. Duane A. Miller, an American missiologist and Anglican priest, offers a theological and pastoral reading of Job as a resource for persecuted believers.

The editors note that the book’s thematic structure moves from conceptual foundations to applied the-



Symposium on “Religious Persecution” at Fjellhaug International University College in Oslo © IIRF



Editors, authors and publisher during the launch @ IIRF

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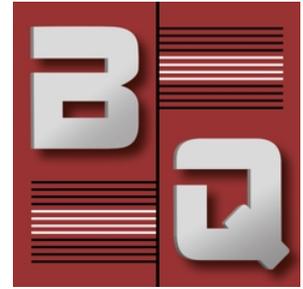
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ology, aiming to bridge academic study and practical ministry. “Our motivation has been shaped by the desire to offer theological and missiological perspectives that speak into [the] reality” of persecution, Lilleaasen and Sauer write in their preface. “Ultimately, this book is written to serve Christians who are under pressure for their faith. We hope it will inspire, encourage, and equip.”

The “Christians under Pressure” series launched with “Fruitful Minorities” (2018), edited by Bernhard Reitsma, on Christian witness in Islamic contexts, followed by “Overcomers” (2021) by Kay Bascom, on God’s deliverance through the Ethiopian Revolution.

Downloads and Links:

- **Photo 1:** VKW book launch “Religious Persecution” Fjellhaug International University College in Oslo © IIRF
- **Photo 2:** Symposium on “Religious Persecution” at Fjellhaug International University College in Oslo © IIRF
- **Photo 3:** Editors, authors and publisher during the launch © IIRF
- Website on the book “Religious Persecution”: <https://iirf.global/?p=6233>
- All books of the “Christians under Pressure”-Series: <https://iirf.global/tag/christians-under-pressure/>
- Presentation at the book launch by Prof. Dr. Christof Sauer: <https://bonner-querschnitte.de/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Oslo-Anthology-launch.pdf>
- Book review by Dr. Anna Hampton, in Int’l Journal of Frontier Missiology, January-December 2025, pp. 131–138 (appeared December 2025): https://ijfm.dreamhosters.com/PDFs_IJFM/41_1_4_PDFs/IJFM_41_1_4-BooksandMissiology.pdf
- Book review by Kristina Patring, Senior Advisor mission theology and Freedom of religion or belief at the SMC – Faith in Development and PhD student, ETF Leuven, in Norse Tidsskrift for Misjonsvitenskap (NTM) 2/2025, pp. 315–316: <https://journals.mf.no/ntm/article/view/5665/4630>

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