"But with gentleness and respect": Why missions should be ruled by ethics – An Evangelical Perspective on a Code of Ethics for Christian Witness

First plenary statement at the international theological consultation **"Towards an ethical approach to conversion: Christian witness in a multi-religious world"** at the Institut de Science et de Theologie des Religions in Toulouse, France from August 8-12, 2007

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) and the Office on Interreligious Relations and Dialogue (IRRD) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) with delegates from the World Evangelical Alliance.

[Official version authorised by the World Evangelical Alliance]

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Mission corrupted

"The First Book of Common Prayer" of the Anglican (Episcopal) Church, authorized in 1549, says in its liturgy:

"There was never any thing by the wit of man so well devised, or so sure established, which in continuance of time hath not been corrupted."

This is even true of Christian mission, of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, the "Prince of peace". This is why, for example, the Pope apologized to the Jews and to scientists[1] for using force against them in history, instead of trying to listen to them, convince them by good argument, and live peacefully together with them.

The international 'Lausanne Covenant' of 1974, probably the most influential Evangelical document in existence, not surprisingly calls heartily for mission, nevertheless states in article 12:

"At other times, desirous to ensure a response to the gospel, we have compromised our message, manipulated our hearers through pressure techniques, and become unduly preoccupied with statistics or even dishonest in our use of them. All this is worldly. The Church must be in the world; the world must not be in the Church."

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[1] When speaking about the Galilei-affair.

Article 13 therefore sees the peace of a country as an important matter:

"It is the God-appointed duty of every government to secure conditions of peace, justice and liberty in which the Church may obey God, serve the Lord Jesus Christ, and preach the gospel without interference."

I am very sorry, as is the World Evangelical Alliance, for any case, in which evangelicals, especially those connected with the 128 national Evangelical Alliances, have put undue pressure on other people to call them to conversion or have violated human rights in the name of mission. Evangelicals love the Bible and by using unethical means of evangelism, those who have used such methods were disobedient to God's word, as the First letter of Peter commands:

"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak badly against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil." (1 Peter 3:15-17)

Even though the WEA and the national alliances often do not have the influence on their members they would wish to have and surely have no influence on the millions of other evangelicals, who even refuse to go together with the international evangelical bodies, the WEA is willing to use its influence in any way possible to ensure that mission stays away from any misuse of people and never violates their human rights and dignity.

1 Peter 3:15-17

Let me return to 1 Peter 3 to give my ideas a biblical foundation. Here you find a complementarity of the necessity of witness, even apologetics (the Greek texts says 'apologia', originally defense in a court) on the one side, and respect for the dignity of the other human being in "gentleness and respect" on the other side. The dignity of man does not lead us to hide our hope, but to clearly state, explain, and even defend it, but the clear answers to questions with a bad intent can never allow us to destroy the dignity of the people with whom we are talking. Both sides are complementary, as both are an inevitable essence of our faith.

According to 1 Peter 3, humans do not directly discuss with God when talking to us. Yes, we can be God's ambassadors and give witness to God's hope in us. But otherwise, we are also only human beings, saved by the grace of God, not by our own virtue. We want people to gain peace with God, to receive his forgiveness, to trust God as the only truth, but it is not us, against whom they sinned, it is not us, to whom they should bow down, it is not us, who are the truth and hold the truth in everything we say. Christians are not Doctor-Know-All, but are normal humans, that only know something special as far as they witness to the revealed truth in Jesus Christ and its history as written in Scripture.

Christians see others always as images of God, even if they totally disagree with them. In Christianity, their human rights do not stem from being Christians, but from being men and women, as God created all people and created them equal. There are religions, which

only accept human rights for their own adherents, but Christians defend even the human rights of their enemies – and pray for them and love them.

At a time, when especially Islamicists pour violence on many Christians and in which Hindu or Buddhist nationalists go against Christians and others in countries like India or Sri Lanka, it would be easy just to point to the others. But the Christian faith is very self critical – the Old and New Testaments mainly criticise the people of God and not other people. We do want to say with the Pharisee in Christ's example: "God, I thank you, that I am not like the others", but we need to say like the tax collector, who said: "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (from Luke 18:11-13). So our first question as Christians is not: What do others do, but, as Peter's letter says, even in the middle of false accusations: Are we gentle and full of respect to our fellow human beings, to whom we try to explain our hope and faith?

I know that many of the delegates – Catholic, Orthodox, Oriental and Protestants alike - come from countries where Christians are under much pressure from a State religion or by politically extreme wings of religions, like those from Algeria, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal or Myanmar. But even as we do not want to hide any crimes in the name of religion, your testimonies show, how important it is and what a testimony it is when we do not pay back but want to react Christ-like to pressure, violence and even martyrdom.

Why Evangelicals?

Evangelicals always have been highly dedicated to religious freedom, including the religious freedom of non-evangelical churches. When in the middle of the 19th century, pastors of state churches and independent churches in Europe started to meet across borders, thus forming the earliest ecumenical movement, religious freedom in Europe, where religion was still often compulsory, was one of their major goals. In 1852 e.g., a high ranking delegation of the Evangelical Alliance visited the Ottoman sultan on behalf of persecuted Orthodox churches and in this tradition today well equipped evangelical religious freedom lawyers have run and won cases in the European Court for Human Rights for several non-protestant churches, like the Bessarabian Church or the Greek Orthodox Church. The orthodox churches in Turkey as well as the dying old churches in Iraq today find their greatest help in evangelical organizations, as evangelicals heavily use international media, but also – as in the case of Germany – the help of parliament and governments.

The estimates for the number of evangelicals range from 300 to 700 million; the WEA seeks to serve a global constituency of 420 million. These evangelicals seem to be more often in the middle of the problems, when it comes to confrontations between non-Christian religions and Christianity, and even within Christianity. Why is this so? What does the professor of sociology of religion in me say self-critically about the movement to which I belong?

1. Evangelical groups overall have the highest percentage of Christians who come from a non-Christian background and become Christians as adults or at least as teenagers. Only among sects like the Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses are there sometimes higher percentages of first generation adherents. The evangelical movement is rapidly growing in Africa and Asia (primarily through the witness of Africans and Asians) and producing a

lot of Christians with no local or general history of peaceful interaction within the culture. In Turkey for example, 95% of all evangelicals are converts from Islam. Of course they draw much more attention and threats than the historic churches, which often have paid for their existence the price of never intervening with the rest of the population.

In the Turkish branch of our Martin Bucer Theological Seminary, run under a Turkish board, we have some Orthodox and Catholic students, who otherwise cannot study theology in Turkey, and in our churches there we have members from an Islamic background, who wanted to convert to Orthodoxy, but could not be accepted by those churches for security reasons and therefore ended up in an evangelical church and studying in an evangelical seminary. When Islamicists killed one of our students and two of our staff in Malatya, Turkey, this spring, people of course pointed to the evangelicals, while the real story is more complicated and involves all the churches. I cannot see that Catholics really have any advantage or more rights in Turkey than evangelicals. (By the way: the Turkish state often confuse evangelicals with Jehovah's Witnesses – going from door to door, but they - strangely enough – have given the Jehovah's Witnesses full rights as an accepted religion, which most Christian churches do not have.)

2. Evangelical groups seldom represent old autochthon churches. There are no 'Evangelical' countries like there are Catholic, Orthodox, or Lutheran countries. Even so although they make up hundreds of millions, Evangelicals are not the major religious grouping in any country of the world, perhaps with the exception of Guatemala.

3. Many evangelical groups have large branches within traditional and main line churches. This is the reason why the WEA probably has up to half of its adherents within the mainlain churches of the WCC [eg evangelicals in the Anglican church] – even though this number is debated. The evangelicals tend to be very active church members and stir up much more discussion in the denominations, hopefully often to the good, but sometimes to the bad.

4. Evangelical groups often have an Anglo-Saxon background and transport the American idea of total freedom of speech and press and total freedom for the individual, as well as less respect for old traditional structures and cultures. But as American evangelicals make up only 8% of all evangelicals in the world, this is rapidly changing.

Religious Freedom in its modern form – not the anti-religious and violent from of the French revolution – but the modern, peaceful form, was, so to speak, 'invented' by Baptist Roger Williams in the end of the 17th century in Providence – Prof. Gary Colpepper from Providence College is among us. We are glad about this start, but not all countries are prepared for the form of religious freedom that America, Canada or Australia have long practised. Christian Western Germany, for example, adopted this kind of religious freedom only in 1949 and even then it was only gradually really accepted by churches and people. And some forms of freedom of speech in the USA even concern Europeans and European Christians, e.g., it is virtually impossible to close a website, no matter how horrible and violent it is. Thus Hitler's 'Mein Kampf' is only available on American (and Arabian) websites.

5. Evangelicals mostly have a very flat hierarchy and non-denominational bodies like the WEA have moral authority but no direct means to get bad sheep to change. (Of course that is no different from the WCC.) As the Bible and the emphasis on a very personal decision for one's faith hold the movement together, the WEA has its major authority through theological teaching and exposition of the Bible, which showthat certain things are unethical in light of Divine revelation.

6. Evangelicals recently are very much driven by the enthusiasm of the Majority World ('Two-Third World'), no longer by the Western type of religion.

Asia has become one of the big centers of Christianity and the leading one in absolute numbers. South Korea is second only in number of missionaries in all the world to the USA – be it Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical or Pentecostal missionaries, and India and China have each more fulltime and lay evangelists within their countries from all Christian branches than any other countries. And if the vast growing number of Catholics and Evangelicals eager to evangelize China and the whole world get political freedom to do so, this development will rapidly speed up.

The large Christian bodies, whose hierarchies are still often dominated by Western people, cannot just tell Christians in Africa and Asia how they should behave. Only together *with* their enthusiasm for Christ, their deep spiritual life, and their theological and academic insight, can we find good ways for the future.

Let me take as an example India and Germany, the two countries I know the best. From the point of view of an Indian Catholic evangelist, any Evangelical evangelist in Germany seems to be lacking inspiration or vitality. From the point of view of an Evangelical evangelist in Germany, every Catholic evangelist in India seems to be too enthusiastic and putting much too much pressure on people. It is too simple to tell Christians from other cultures to change, if this is more a demand to be like one's own culture, than a demand to be Christlike.

On the other hand, evangelical groups are very highly dedicated to defending religious liberty worldwide and are rarely involved as a party in civil wars, and are not connected with terror groups in any way. This should be honored more by other groups!

Some say that the Iraq war is an exception, as the US-president Bush[2] has an evangelical leaning and in the beginning many American evangelicals favored the war, but so did many other religious groups and I cannot see any evangelical motivations and goals in this war beyond what generally is called 'civil religion' in the US.[3] Especially there was no intention to make anyone Christian or to spread the gospel – fortunately. Jimmy Carter was an evangelical too, and like many evangelical organizations in the US, he is a major critic of the second Iraq war. Besides, the vast majority of the international evangelical commu-

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[2] Linguist Lisanna Görzt did a resaerch on all radio lectures of Bush for her Master dissertation at the University of Bonn and came to the conclusion, that Bush speaks of God less frequently than most of his predecessors in office, and his religious tones only appear in lectures on Christian holdays such as Easter or Christmas.

[3] See Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz. America's Battle for God: A European Christian Looks at Civil Religion. Grand Rapids (MI): Eerdmans, 2007.

nity was against the war, knowing to what unrest it would lead and that it would kill any religious freedom in Iraq, as far as it still existed. This surely was no evangelical war.

In countries like Sri Lanka or the historic Catholic islands in Indonesia, there is more and more no longer much difference between the pressure on new evangelical churches and those Catholic and Orthodox churches, who have been there for centuries.

One of the founders of the German Evangelical Alliance, Theodor Christlieb, professor of practical theology and mission at Bonn University, fought for years at the International Alliance conference, through a book in several languages discussed in the British parliament and other means, against the Indo-British opium trade, especially because he saw it as both immoral politics and an immoral way of doing mission, and a wrong mixture of presenting the gospel by using political and military pressure.[4] There are many similar examples which show that Evangelicals have a history of being aware of unethical means of spreading the Christian faith.

From WEA perspectives

Let me add some words from the specific perspective of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA).

Representing the (WEA) at this consultation are besides myself Richard Howell, general secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of India, and John Langlois, an attorney and former member of parliament of Guernsey, Channel Islands, chairman of the Religious Liberty Commission of the WEA and a long time member of the executive council of the WEA. There also are representatives from Pentecostal churches connected both to the WCC and the WEA, but as they will have the chance to speak for themselves, I will not speak for them.

I also bring greetings from the International Director of the WEA, Geoff Tunnicliffe from Canada, who has given his full approval to our process here and expresses the hope that the spirit of Christ will lead us in all discussions and finally will help us to give testimony about Jesus and the gospel to others only in ways that bring honor and not dishonour to God's name.

We need to agree on a code of acceptable conduct in the spreading of the Christian Gospel and what conduct needs to be banned, such as inducing people to convert by bribing them, using harassment,threats or political force, robbing children from their parents or lying about one's own faith. From our point of view these are universal principles and a code should not be directed solely against Evangelicals and Pentecostals (which is a branch of Evangelicalism). As Evangelicals/Pentecostals carry out a great part of all Christian missions, if we want to pursue the black sheep within Evangelicalism/Pentecostalism

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[4] See my „Christlieb, Theodor". S. 188 in: A. Scott Moreau (Hg.). Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions. Baker Books: Grand Rapids (MI) & Paternoster Press: Carlisle (GB), 2000; „Christlieb contra Opiumhandel". pp. 105-109 in: Karl Heinz Voigt, Thomas Schirrmacher. Menschenrechte für Minderheiten in Deutschland und Europa: Vom Einsatz für die Religionsfreiheit durch die Evangelische Allianz und die Freikirchen im 19. Jahrhundert. zugleich Idea-Dokumentation 3/2004. VKW: Bonn, 2003; and my first doctoral thesis: Theodor Christlieb und seine Missionstheologie. Wuppertal: Telos, 1985.

we only will succeed if the wording of any Code is acceptable to the WEA constituency as a whole. Otherwise Evangelicals will rightly say: "This is one of the long list of statements against Evangelicals". To be frank, many Evangelicals have often had the impression that any warning against 'proselytism' is actually a veto against any evangelism or at least against evangelism by evangelicals, by not differentiating between the many different evangelical groups. In the past it has seemed as if only evangelicals made mistakes in evangelism.

I do not say this, to accuse anybody, but to ask you to give us a chance to be involved and to ask you to understand how we can win over Evangelical 'black sheep' to adhere to acceptable modes of evangelism. In the same way as the Catholic church has moved away from using politics as a means to safeguard or expand the church, so evangelicalism has its own developments leading to our being part of this meeting, and I hope we all are willing to distinguish between the groups meeting here in general, and certain of their wings that create problems in their own bodies as well as with outsiders.

WEA and Evangelicals in general are, for example, very upset about what some American tele-evangelists say from time to time about other religions, including following turmoil in countries like the recent turmoil in India. Think, for example, of Pat Robertson's statement that all Muslims should leave the USA, which was a headline on many major Indian newspapers next day, arguing that if Christians want Muslims to leave 'their' country, why do they object if Hindus want Christians to leave India! I just happened to be in India that day and was shocked. This was a good example of a bad mixture of evangelism and party politics with a very strange and unfeasible political idea (see appendix 2).

I also ask all churches and branches of Christianity to stand together against violent attacks by others. The growing attacks in e.g., India and Sri Lanka, with anti-conversion laws against Catholics and Evangelicals at the same time, should be answered together and not by pointing to another Christian confession's fault. If there are faults, and most often they are on all sides, we need to find ways to discuss them among ourselves, not through public press accusations and statements.

In countries like Malaysia or India, the Catholic Church, the National Councils of Churches, and the National Evangelical Alliance have already formed joint umbrella organizations, that can speak to the State with one Christian voice and can help to stand together in the middle of persecution.[5]

I propose, in order to get around the whole topic of theological and ecumenical pitfalls, that we keep this strictly a discussion leading to a written code of conduct, where Christians see the borderline between acceptable missions protected by religious freedom and undue forms of trying to call people to conversion, especially through economic and political means. We, then, as the whole body of the largest world religion, could ask other world religions not to follow our code, but to agree on and write a code for and with

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[5] The number of books and study conferences, where the through bodies are presented equally, are on the rise, e.g., in Carl E. Braaten (ed.). Church Unity and the Papal Office: An Ecumenical Dialogue on John Paul II's Encyclical Ut unum sint. Grand Rapids (MI): Eerdmans, 2001, where there is a strong evangelical statement included. See also the ecumenical statements in Harold D. Hunter, Cecil M. Robeck. The Suffering Body: Responding to the Persecution of Christians. Milton Keynes (GB): Paternoster, 2006.

themselves, setting aside any problem of syncretism among religions and setting aside the problem of Christians needing to agree somehow on missions to non-Christians.

An ethical code

Improvements in recent Christian history

But let me now leave speaking specifically to evangelicalism and turn to our common task.

Changing one's religion – and the political unrest following it - is not a new phenomenon, but a very historic one, be it famous people like Augustine, be it whole continents (e.g., Southeast Asia to Buddhism, Europe to Christianity or Northern Africa and the Near East to Islam) and it has often played a central role in local and world politics.

Not changing one's religion was in Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist societies very often more due to the pressure of culture and surroundings, than due to conviction. In history, probably more people were forced to change their religion or to stay in their own religion, than there were people, who freely and knowledgably chose or kept their religion.

In most of the past centuries Christians were often, like most Muslims are today, demanding that other people leave their religion and convert, but not allowing to leave one's own religion, be it Christianity or Islam, punishing apostasy with all kinds of civil results, from losing family, civil rights, reputation and jobs to losing one's life.

We experienced and still experiencing the end of the Constantinian era, which includes the end of safeguarding Christianity by means of the Caesar and forcing people into the church by political, juridical, economical and other civil pressures.Most Christians feel this is not a catastrophe but an advantage. The Christian faith again can live by spiritual means and through the power of the Holy Spirit, and does not need the help of the worldly powers, be it armies, governments or business. Some time ago the Pope closed a Catholic radio station in Poland which was not willing to give up party politics in Poland. I believe that this does not weaken the church but that it strengthens its specific task.

In the overall picture, Christianity and its churches as a whole have taken the right course in the last hundred years, abstaining more and more from violence, from being involved in wars or civil wars, and from using political means or economical pressure for missions. I do not say that there are not still some bad situations, but if you compare the year 2007 and roughly a century ago, today bad situations like Northern Ireland or the so-called Christian terrorist organisation 'National Liberation Front' (NLFT) in Northeast India or the Nagaland rebels are at the fringe of Christianity, and the churches or Christians involved are criticised by the vast majority of Christians or churches worldwide, while e.g., in the First World War in Europe xmany major churches fuelled the war and gave their authority to European countries involved in war as well as in the whole colonial world. Praise God, there no longer is a broad acceptance of violence in propagating its own message in the Christian world. There is just the opposite development as in Islam, where the

Islamicist's acceptance of violence to conquer the world makes inroads into the Muslim community even where they lived peacefully with other groups for centuries.

The forced conversion of the Saxons by the German emperor or the Goa inquisition in India are mainly history, and we Christians are glad, because they belong to the darkest pages of church history. Today millions become Christians every day, who do not come from a Christian background, but do so by pure conviction without any pressure. More people are converting to Christianity than at any time when Christians allowed violent expansion to corrupt its message. What the gun boats of Western colonial powers did not achieve in China, the gospel message achieves nowadays without outside help.

Nowadays it is more the Christian community that suffers hard persecution in certain countries and areas and the number of martyrs is growing daily. Virtually all 'Christian' or former Christian countries grant religious freedom to all religions, while the number of "non-Christian countries" that do not grant the same rights to Christian churches is still high.

The arguments for anti-conversion laws in some states of India (three since the 60s and 70s, some more just recently) and in Sri Lanka are mainly in vain.[6] Besides true or half true historic examples and the devastations by liberation armies with a background in Christian areas the examples they quote do not stand the test of research or belong to the area of conspiracy theories, e.g., Christian missionaries bringing deadly bacteria to Brazilian tribes.

If we want to fight the persecution of Christians, if we want to fight for the right to testify to our faith and practise it in public, we should start even more to ban any means of practising our faith and witness which violates the human rights of others! And we should ban them together.

Holding the next generation to one's religion?

We have to see that worldwide developments do not make things easier. Globalisation will lead to an ever growing meeting or confrontation between religions, from the private level up to world politics, whether it be peaceful and fruitful, or whether it be senseless or harmful. A higher percentage of the world population changes their religious affiliation every year than ever before. There are three major reasons for this.

1. Children today often change the profession, life style and music of their parents, even move to totally different places or countries, and many feel less and less obliged to follow the traditions of their forefathers. A growing number of orphans or displaced people even have no chance to get to know their parents' culture and home. In the Western countries parents have to pay for their childrens' education, even if they do not like the professions

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[6] Eg „Conversion Tactics - Violence". www.christianaggression.org/tactics_violence.php. Andreas Nehring. "Bekehrung als Protest: Zur Bekehrung religiöer Identität der Dalits in Indien". Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft 12 (2004): 3-21 proves, that anti-conversion laws are not griunded in any Christian danger whatsoever, but in the protest of the Dalits against Hinduism and the political reaction of those Hindus, who do not want to loose the caste identity of India. See also Yaruingam Awungshi. Hinduism and Christianity in India: A Study of Socio-historical Process of Conversion. New Delhi, India : Uppal Pub. House, 2005

their children choose. What started in the West makes inroads into one country and culture after the next.

Religion is no exception here and it can hardly be made the only exception.[7] In the Western world it is just normal that children change religion and political orientation. In other regions of the world statistically this phenomenon is on the rise and often meets cultures that are totally unprepared and experience this as a shock.

2. Globalisation including radio, TV and internet confronts every adherent of a specific religion at least in theory with all the many other religions in the world, while 100 years ago the vast majority of the world's population never got into contact with the message of another religion or another confession in their whole lifetime!

At the same time the number of cross religious marriages is growing – to take just one typical area of change -, because young people on average get to know many more possible partners than a generation ago and among them more possible partners from other religions than ever before. In Germany, marriages between Catholics and free church-evangelicals have become common, even though it is still something pastors on both sides do not like at all. So suddenly a Catholic priest and a Baptist pastor, who otherwise ignored each other, have to meet on behalf of a couple.

3. The modern relationship between parents and children and globalization is supplemented by the growing number of democratic states in the 20th century. In a democracy there is religious freedom and religious pluralism. That normally helps small religious communities without any political influence more than the majority religions, who in pre-democratic times often could rely on the help of politics and civil society for at least subtle pressure of the whole culture to stay with the religion in which one was born. Latin America is a typical inner-Christian example, as the long standing dominance of Catholic faith – both in numbers and political influence – is giving way to a growing group of Protestant churches and different sects and cults, especially in the free countries.

To stir up a little discussion with my Catholic friends: When the Pope blamed evangelicals for stealing millions of sheep in Latin America, I had two questions: 1. Is there someone, that really can control what, e.g., Brazilians do? And as you probably know, it is not American evangelicals, that evangelize in Brazil, but Brazilian evangelicals, and if even the Pope has problems with Latin American bishops, how should an evangelical body really tell Brazilians to stop preaching? 2. Is it really the major danger, that Latin America becomes evangelical? Is it not much more a greater danger that Latin America becomes non-Christian? In Spain the Catholic church loses 2.7% of its members each year, mostly to atheism and non-belief – there are les than half a million evangelicals in Spain. What, if for 20 years all those leaving the Catholic Church would have become evangelical? But – as I said – this is only seen as a starting point for discussion.

Especially in democracies many young people choose their favourite religion as they choose their favourite music style or even cell phone company and have no grasp what

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[7] See the discussion in Paul M. Taylor. Freedom of Religion: UN and European Human Rights Law and Practice. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2005, that discusses the centrality of the right to change one's religion for religious liberty and the human rights in general.

major impact this has for society, culture and tradition. In Eastern Europe many churches and religious groups are experiencing this more and more since 1989 and for many it is like a thief in the night.

Often, when a country becomes democratic or extends religious liberty rights, Crypto-religionists will show up, until then hid to which religion they really belong. Crypto-religionists outwardly give the appearance to follow the official religion, while secretly believing and practising a different one. So when the emperor allowed Protestantism in Catholic Austria in the 18th century, suddenly thousands of crypto-protestants showed up and demanded their own public services. On the other side, in totalitarian countries you often have many crypto-religionists. Thus in Islamic countries like Egypt there are many secret Christians, in Shiite Iran there are many crypto-Sunnites. And even in India, there is a large number of crypto-Christians believed to be among the officially Hindu Dalits.

The human rights revolution protecting religious freedom has brought about a religious balkanization and a growing war for souls, which all kinds of anti conversion laws have often tried to stop – usually with no real results.

Things can become complicated in a globalised world. I once preached in our local Salvation Army and met a homeless man wandering through European countries, who had just become a Christian and wanted to know from me what it means to be a Christian in detail and how actually to become a Christian. A Catholic archbishop in Mainz had washed his feet on Palm Sunday, where canon law expects him once a year - in remembrance of Jesus washing the apostles' feet - to call in some unknown people passing by the cathedral and wash their feet. This homeless man was so amazed that the famous bishop would wash his feet that he became a Christian after hating God for two decades. But to whom does he belong now? To the Catholic Church, because the bishop was Catholic? To the Protestant State Church, because he asked me about it and was baptised into it as a child? To the Salvation Army, because we met in one of their services and they were caring for this homeless man? Or does the evangelical point of view count, that the most important thing is that an atheist or at least non-practising Christian dedicated his life to the living God? Of course it is not I who decides by counselling this man, but he will use his own right to decide for himself. What did he do? He decided to visit all three churches regularly, not to the amusement of the different pastors involved!

I hope that Christians are mature enough to find ways to discuss these things, to find ways to solve these problems in discussion together, and to find basic general guidelines for an ethical code dealing with complicated situations, at least to clarify what should *not* be done.

What we need to achieve as Christians is - from my point of view – the combination of a clear *YES* to spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ and to prayer, that the Holy Spirit convinces the heart of people, with a clear *NO* to unethical ways of doing it, ways that go against the command and the spirit of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

From Lariano to Toulouse

The inter-faith reflection on "Conversion: Assessing the Reality", met at Lariano (Italy) on May 12-16, 2006. 27 people, representing Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and the Yoruba religion agreed that a code of conduct for propagating one's own faith should be achieved. The meeting was organised by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican City, and the Office on Interreligious Relations & Dialogue of the World Council of Churches, Geneva, and was supposed to be the first phase of a three phase process.

The first meeting was supposed to be an inter-faith meeting discussing the whole project in general and give a chance to listen to the complaints of people of four non-Christian religions. The second meeting, which was prepared by a small group meeting January 11-12, 2007 in Geneva, was supposed to be a larger meeting of all branches of Christianity (though some other faiths could be present as observers to bridge the process from the first to the third phase), trying to achieve the text of a code of conduct. The third phase will be more of an inter-faith meeting again, trying to enlarge the idea of a code of conduct to all religious groups as far as they are willing to get involved.

In my opinion the central result of Lariona isin the following two paragraphs.

"Freedom of religion is a fundamental, inviolable and non-negotiable right of every human being in every country in the world. Freedom of religion connotes the freedom, without any obstruction, to practise one's own faith, freedom to propagate the teachings of one's faith to people of one's own and other faiths, and also the freedom to embrace another faith out of one's own free choice." (Report Lariano 2006, no. 2)

"We affirm that while everyone has a right to invite others to an understanding of their faith, it should not be exercised by violating other's rights and religious sensibilities." (Report Lariano 2006, no. 3)

The theme of the second phase was agreed to be "Towards an ethical approach to conversion: Christian witness in a multi-religious world". Thus the main task will be to fill in the details to thesis no. 6 of the Lariano Report: "A particular reform that we would commend to practitioners and establishments of all faiths is to ensure that conversion by 'unethical' means is discouraged and rejected by one and all. There should be transparency in the practice of inviting others to one's faith." (Lariano Report 2006, no. 6)

What actually are "unethical" ways of doing mission and can we ban those ways with the voice of all branches of Christianity?

The theme "Towards an ethical approach to conversion: Christian witness in a multi-religious world" clarifies two things:

1. The second phase is an intra-Christian phase.

The idea is that Christians first of all find a code of conduct among themselves and are willing to bind themselves in applying it also in their relations with other religions. If even Christians are unable to find a peaceful way of doing missions among each other in a way

that respects the human dignity and rights of others, how could it be found among the different religions?

But if Christians *can* find a code of conduct, it could bring encouragement to other world religions to find a code of conduct among their own branches and finally those codes could be compared and possibly built into a code of conduct for all religions.

Christians should start with a self-obligation, not to make a deal with other religions, but because they want to act morally right and Christ-like, and possible mistakes of others do not give them the right to act unethically.

If Christians agree to a code of conduct, they can also start to put it into practise among their own followers. Often local Christians groups – e.g., Catholic or Evangelical – will not always listen to their representatives on a world level (eg the Vatican or the World Evangelical Alliance), but a code would be a good starting point for discussion and hopefully put a lot of moral pressure on Christians who combine mission with unnecessary offense to people, or with unethical economic and political pressure.

2. The second phase has a practical and ethical goal, not a mainly theological one.

From my point of view, it should not be the center of the discussion to find a common theological definition of missions because: 1. A lot of good documents have been produced by ecumenical and evangelical study conferences on these topics; 2. ethical standards on how to deal with other Christians and other religions can be put in place even when theological agreement is not yet achieved or cannot be achieved for the time being. The center should be a code of conduct to which we all agree, describing ethically what should never happen in the realm of mission.

Theological and confessional pitfalls should not allow us to be sidetracked from a discussion leading to a written code of conduct, where Christians see the borderline between acceptable missions protected by religious freedom and undue forms of trying to get people to convert, mainly through means in the area of the economic and political world. We then, as the whole body of the largest world religion, could ask other world religions – if not to follow our code -, to agree on a code of conduct for and within themselves, leaving out any problem of syncretism and the Christian needing to agree somehow on the evaluation of non-Christian mission.

A code of conduct that bans ways to urge conversion by unethical means only makes sense if it is not directed against any one group alone. If it is true, what the Lariano Report writes for all religions, then it also must be true for *all* branches of Christianity: "We acknowledge that errors have been perpetrated and injustice committed by the adherents of every faith. Therefore, it is incumbent on every community to conduct honest self-critical examination of its historical conduct as well as its doctrinal/theological precepts. Such self-criticism and repentance should lead to necessary reforms inter alia on the issue of conversion." (Lariana Report 2006, no. 5)

This obviously does not mean that the second phase should exclude theology and theological questions around missions and ethics. We all would be happy if we move towards

a greater agreement in theology and the message of mission during the whole process. But the practical outcome should always be in focus.

Some Christians make a distinction between proselytism (illegitimate) and evangelism (legitimate). Eastern Orthodox writer Stephen Methodius Hayes has written: "If people talk about the need for evangelism, they meet with the response, 'the Orthodox church does not proselytize' as if evangelizing and proselytism were the same thing." However the boundary varies from group to group. For instance the Moscow Patriarchate has repeatedly strongly condemned what it describes as Catholic proselytism of Orthodox Christians within Russia. The Catholic Church claims that it is supporting the existing Catholic community within Russia and is not proselytizing.[8] The WCC once stated: "In the history of the Church, the term "proselytism" has been used as a positive term and even as an equivalent concept for missionary activity. More recently, especially in the context of the modern ecumenical movement, it has taken on a negative connotation" On the other side, proselytism for many centuries has been a positive term like spreading the gospel.

We will have to discuss, whether we can name the problem just in terms of (good) evangelism and mission, and (bad) 'proselytism'. I doubt whether this will really help, at least as long we do not resist the temptation to call what we do 'evangelism' always, and what others do 'proselytism'.

On the other hand there needs to be clarification of language too. Not only, because language of warfare can easily sound like using unethical means in mission – see e.g., the attached "Statement on Mission Language" of the Evangelical Fellowship of India, but also because wrong theological language can lead us into problems.

So e.g., we all agree that we cannot convert someone. We can witness, we can explain to him what conversion means, we can call him to conversion, but we cannot convert him. A human being can only convert his own heart to his creator and this conversion is only possible because of God's grace and the wonderful action of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the saying 'I converted him' easily slips from our lips, even though it is both theologically wrong and can easily be misunderstood by outsiders.

3. The second phase includes discussion of human rights in general

A code of conduct – even though formulated by Christians only for the time being - would be of great value in talking to *governments* that want to know how to permit religious freedom legally (including the right to do mission), but at the same time to defend against using religion for suppressing human dignity or unnecessary social unrest.

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[8] "Russian patriarch renews complaints on Catholic 'proselytism'", 5.10.2006, http://directionstoorthodoxy.org/mod/news/view.php?article_id=198 vs. "Moscow´s Catholic Archbishop Responds to Alexy II´s Accusations". 15.2.2002, www.zenit.org/article-3698?l=english.

Many governments are nervous and fear that religions will fuel strife, violence and social unrest. We can help them a lot by speaking with one voice and giving them a practical code from our side.[9]

Thus, besides discussing Christian mission, we also have an ethical-political topic. How can we preserve the human right of religious freedom, while at the same time preserving the same right of others and preserve all other just human rights?[10]

Article 18.2 of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights says: "No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice." We want this to be true for us, but we also want this to be true for others, with whom we engage in discussion.

The American legal expert Natan Lenner wrote rightly:

"No single human right can be considered in isolation; all human rights are interconnected. There may exist tensions between various human rights. For instance, the right to proselytize, with respect to freedom of expression, might interfere with other rights equally deserving of protection"[11]

"This is particularly true when proselytism is conducted in places where people are present by force of law and constitute a 'captive audience': classrooms, military installations, prisons, hospitals, and the like. Exposing people in captive audiences to undesired or uninvited proselytism may be considered a violation of their rights and a form of coercion."

"Proselytism involving material enticement (money, gifts or privileges) should be considered a form of coercion and, thus, may be limited by law. Such material enticements exceed the area of freedom of speech and expression. However, the borderline cases are not easy to judge."[12]

Let me add one thing for the sake of completeness, which is often forgotten: Violence and undue pressure cannot only be used to get people to leave a religion, but also to stay in it! To force young people to stay in e.g., a natural religion in a Brazilian tribe, is as bad as to force them to become e.g., Christians. You also can violate human rights by preventing people from converting to another faith.

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[9] See the excellent discussion in Burkhard Guntau. „Möglichkeit und Grenzen der Religionsfreiheit". Materialdienst der EZW 70 (2007) 9: 325-336.

[10] The best discussion of this topic known to me besides the article of Guntau is: Jean-Paul Marthoz, Joseph Saunders. "Religion and the Human Rights Movement". pp. 40-69 in Human Rights Watch World Report 2005. New York: Human Rights Watch, 2005, also seperat under www.hrw.org/wr2k5/religion/religion.pdf. See also John Witte, Johan D. van der Vyveer (ed.). Religious Human Rights in Global Perspectives: Religious Perspectives. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1996; Johan D. van der Vyveer, John Witte (ed.). Religious Human Rights in Global Perspectives: Legal Perspectives. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1996.

[11] Natan Lerner. „Proselytism, Change of Religion, and International Human Rights". International Religious Liberty Association. www.irla.org/documents/articles/lerner-proselytism.html.

[12] Ibid.

Unethical means

The Roman Catholic Church stated at Vatican II in 'Ad Gentes': "The Church strictly forbids forcing anyone to embrace the Faith, or alluring or enticing people by worrisome wiles."

What could some of those unethical means be? E.g.:

- Bribe people by money, goods, medical treatment, opportunities or offices, that is, offering people nonspiritual rewards for their conversion.

- Threaten people with civil consequences, putting undue psychological pressure on them or press them for decisions they cannot oversee, e.g., because they are too young or mentally ill.

- Use the authority of a state function while in office (e.g., as police or state school teacher).

- Give or refuse financial advantages (e.g., through banks or in inheritance laws).

- Preach to 'captive audiences', who cannot freely leave (e.g., army officers to their soldiers or a prison director to inmates).

The World Council of Churches in "The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness" gave the following examples:

"… employing any kind of physical violence, moral compulsion and psychological pressure e.g., the use of certain advertising techniques in mass media that might bring undue pressure on readers/viewers;
using political, social and economic power as a means of winning new members for one's own church;
extending explicit or implicit offers of education, health care or material inducements or using financial resources with the intent of making converts;
manipulative attitudes and practises that exploit people's needs, weaknesses or lack of education especially in situations of distress, and fail to respect their freedom and human dignity."[13]

I quote this, even though I think things can be a little more complicated, e.g., what might be moral and what unethical in media use, can be very different in different times and cultures, or when governments see every social action as undue material pressure on possible converts. But at least the quotation names typical topics we have to discuss.

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[13] The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness. Joint Working Group between the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. § 19. 25.9.1995.
http://www.oikoumene.org/de/dokumentation/documents/oerk-kommissionen/gemeinsame-arbeitsgruppe-der-roemisch-katholischen-kirche-und-des-oerk/25-09-95-challenge-of-proselytism.html; see a similar list:
Towards Common Witness: A call to adopt responsible relationships in mission and to renounce proselytism. WCC commission 'Mission and Evangelism'. 19.9.1997. www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/mission-and-evangelism/19-09-97-towards-common-witness.html.

Let me give one example of what a code of conduct could contain concerning the use of military force (and that should be in agreement with all Christian bodies):

"The State and its army has the duty to defend peaceful Christians if they become the victims of illegal violence, but it does not do it specifically because they are Christians, but should do so for anybody else becoming a victim of violence. But, at the same time, an army can never have the task to defend Christianity, propagate the gospel or conquer land for Christianity. In history many Christian areas were conquered by armies, but this was wrong, and using an army to spread a religion is always a wrong mixture of the different tasks of the Church and the State."

It is similarly true that Christians may use the legal system of their states to defend their rights.[14] But equally they should not use the laws and the courts to hinder the rights of other religious groups, if they legally and ethically practise their freedom of religion.

I know that in Islam, Hinduism and partly even in the Jewish faith, the religious law applies one-to-one to all worldly things including the state and makes a separation of church/organised religion and state difficult. But even more so I think that Christians should take the lead and in a kind of self obligation declare that they no longer want to use the monopoly of force of the state for churches' purpose.

To be condemned are violence, coercion, threat, harassment and enticement, as are lies and feigning of false facts to win people for Christ, who otherwise would not follow him.

It will not be easy to nail those unethical means down in a concrete code of conduct, especially as historical, religious, cultural, and political conditions are so different in the world, e.g., if you compare Germany, India, Saudi Arabia and Nepal. But nevertheless we should try to become concrete and not to leave everything loose in only general terms.

Is a forced conversion a conversion? I think all Christian confessions agree that a conversion has to be a deeply personal, finally thought through move of the heart. A forced conversion is nothing we want and nothing we can accept. Therefore if people tell us that they want to convert, we should always give them and offer them time for discernment and should not be speedy to baptise them, but be assured that they really know what they are doing. There also should be honesty and transparency concerning what Christian faith means and what is expected of Christians after their conversion. Christianity is not a secret cult but open to the public. We do not have anything to hide (Matthew 10:26-27). Jesus said concerning those who want to become his followers: "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?" (Luke 14:28; see vv. 27-33). We have to help people to calculate the costs, not to rush them into Christian churches, only to find out later, that they have been cheated.

Ethics and mission belong together. The Christian witness is not a room free of ethics; it needs an ethical basis to really do what Christ commanded us to do.

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[14] See my „Darf ein Christ vor Gericht gehen?". S. 143-156 in: Thomas Schirrmacher, Thomas Zimmermanns (Hg.). Ein Maulkorb für Christen? Juristen nehmen Stellung zum deutschen Antidiskriminierungsgesetz und ähnlichen Gesetzen in Europa und Australien. Bonn: VKW, 2005. zugleich idea-Dokumentation 12/2005.

When people today see daily in TV that religious groups are willing to use any means to further their cause, Christians clearly have to state what means we never will use – and that if some Christians use them anyway, they have lost their right to call this method Christian. The teenager's motto from the US WWJD ("What would Jesus do?") has to guide us especially when we fulfil Jesus' Great Commission.

Appendix 1: Statement on Mission Language of the Evangelical Fellowship of India

[The 'Evangelical Fellowship of India' is the Evangelical Alliance of India that is a national member of the World Evangelical Alliance.]

The national consultation of the Theological Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of India on Mission Language and Biblical Metaphor met at South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies, Bangalore, 4 – 7 October, 2000, with representatives from across India.

We accept the need to be sensitive in our language to show consideration for others and how they may perceive our words. This applies to what we say or write for any medium at all, including letters, reports, songs, prayers, and material on the Internet, for the boundaries between in-house and public domain are disappearing.

Offensive Terms

We acknowledge that some churches and Christian missions have borrowed offensive secular terms, and over-extended military metaphors from the Bible. For example, the Bible uses "soldier" to illustrate how we should obey God, but not to encourage an aggressive attitude to other people. While we want to avoid inappropriate military language, we profit from Bible metaphors that call us to respect and obey God and those in authority.

However, warfare words, such as "army", "advance", "attack," "battle", "campaign," "crusade", "conquer", "commandos", "enemy", "foe," "forces," "marching orders," "mobilize", "soldier," "tactical plan," "target", "victory," "weapons," have been wrongly used as motivational tools for missions. Other offensive words include "pagan," "darkness," and "heathen." Emphasis on such vocabulary is unloving, inappropriate and counterproductive. Language that excludes women also offends. We must continuously examine both our attitudes and our language.

The Danger of Labeling

We believe evil in all its forms is in conflict with the rule of God. Evil is our enemy and not people. We object to language that can wrongly label people as enemies, or appear aggressive. Although the gospel call to follow Christ may cause offence and be opposed by some, we must take care to avoid vocabulary that can be distorted to justify that opposition.

Our Motivation

Warfare language is not our motivation for mission. We share Christ because we experience the love and grace of God, leading us to worship and proclamation. As God loves all people without discrimination, so should we. We respect and serve all in words, attitudes and actions, regardless of caste, race, class, creed and gender.

A Call to Christians

We call upon our brothers and sisters to take care not to offend with words.

We also ask the church outside India to be aware that inappropriate mission language not only offends people of other faiths, but also brings harm to Christians here.

Words that lead us Forward

Let us draw our mission terms from biblical concepts. Let us use words like family, relationship, love, welcome, embrace, reconcile, hope, serve, peace with God, promoting justice, offering gifts of life and blessing.

Rev. Richard Howell, General Secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of India
Dr Augustine Pagolu, Honorary Secretary of the Theological Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of India.

Appendix 2: Press release by Reuters on our January brainstorming meeting

When Reuters printed my critical notes on Pat Robertson in a press release from 18 Jan 2007 after our brainstorming meeting in Geneva, Tom Heneghan, Religion Editor of Reuters Europe (Paris), confronted Pat Robertson with it and got the strange answer printed at the end of this appendix.

Christians seek guidelines for missionary work

By Tom Heneghan, Religion Editor

Reuters News (c) 2007 Reuters Limited

PARIS, Jan 18 (Reuters) - Christians are told to make disciples of all nations, but some missionaries have done this so aggressively in recent years that churches now want a code of conduct to spread their faith without antagonising any others.

A missionary boom in developing countries, often by United States evangelical and Pentecostal Protestants, has brought Christianity into some local conflicts with majority populations that follow faiths such as Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism.

Overzealous preachers stand accused of linking humanitarian aid with baptism and insulting local faiths. Some local Christian minorities, who lived in peace before the boom, now feel a backlash as suspicion mounts against all Christians.

Representatives from the main families of the world's largest faith met in Geneva last week to discuss guidelines to curb aggressive evangelists and reassure other religions that Christian activists are not simply out to steal their sheep.

"Due to increased proselytism in some parts of the Christian family, the fibre of living together is jeopardised," said the Rev. Hans Ucko, a Swedish Lutheran in charge of interreligious dialogue at the Geneva-based World Council of Churches (WCC).

Christian leaders at the meeting, part of a three-year effort aiming to produce a code of conduct by 2009, sought a balance that would let them continue spreading their faith without discrediting it and antagonising other religions.

The meeting brought together an unusually broad spectrum of Christianity, from Roman Catholics and the WCC -- which groups mainline Protestants, Anglicans and Orthodox -- to the World Evangelical Alliance and Pentecostal leaders.

Aid Evangelisation

Tensions over missionary work have flared up over the past decade or so in several regions, most notably in Africa, South Asia and in the Muslim world, as globalisation opened up new avenues for religions to spread their views.

"India and Sri Lanka are two countries that have become very sensitive to this issue," said Monsignor Felix Machado, the Vatican's representative in the discussion.

Hindu nationalists in India have passed anti-conversion laws in some states to stop what they say are missionaries bribing poor people to get baptised. In Sri Lanka, Buddhist nationalists have campaigned -- so far in vain -- for similar laws.

"Aid evangelisation" -- helping disaster victims if they become Christian -- frayed nerves in post-tsunami Indonesia to the point that Jakarta blocked a U.S. evangelical group from placing orphaned Muslim children into a Christian-run home.

The post-tsunami aid rush to Indonesia showed not only Christians help the poor with a possible double agenda. Radical Islamic groups also turned up in mostly Muslim Aceh province.

Fire and Brimstone Sermons

Catholics and mainline Protestants have long accused well-financed evangelical and Pentecostal mission-aries of angering majority faiths in the developing world.

By discussing the issue for the first time, both sides saw this problem was less pressing than the tensions created by fire and brimstone sermons broadcast over satellite television, said Thomas Schirrmacher of the World Evangelical Alliance.

"The main problem is the international, almost exclusively American media," he said. "They are not linked to local churches and have no idea what effect their broadcasts have.

"I was in India when Pat Robertson said all Muslims should leave the United States," he said, referring to a prominent U.S. televangelist. "The Hindus said they agreed that Muslims should leave India too -- and take the Christians with them."

A spokeswoman for Robertson said "The 700 Club," where Robertson has made his most controversial comments about Islam, was only a small part of his satellite broadcasting and most of it was "both culturally sensitive and relevant."

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He holds the following degrees: *M.Th.* (STH, Basel, Switzerland), *Dr. theol.* (Ecumenical Theology & Missiology, TU Kampen, Netherlands), *Ph.D.* (Cultural Anthropology, PWU, Los Angeles), *Th.D.* (Ethics, WTS, Lakeland, Florida), *Dr. phil.* (Sociology of Religion, State University, Bonn, Germany), honorary doctorates: *D.D.* (Anglican Cranmer Theological House, Shreveport, USA), *D.D.* (ACTS University, Bangalore,. India).

He has authored and edited 74 books, which have been translated into 14 languages. He is listed in Marquis' Who's Who in the World, Dictionary of International Biography, 2000 Outstanding Intellectuals of the 21st Century, and other biographical yearbooks.

He lives in Bonn, Germany, is married to Christine, a professor of Islamic Studies, and father of a boy and a girl.