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“Abolish all apostasy laws as they hamper human rights”

Westminster Theological Seminary launches comprehensive study on apostasy in contemporary Islamic Theology by well-known scholar of Islamic Studies Christine Schirmmacher

(Bonn, 19.02.2015) “Abolish all apostasy laws as they hamper human rights”. With these words by Quran scholar Abdullah Saeed from the Maldives and Australia, Christine Schirmmacher marked her guest lecture given on the occasion of the publication of the English translation of her major scholarly work *“Let there be no Compulsion in Religion” (Sura 2:256): Apostasy from Islam as judged by contemporary Islamic Theologians – Discourses on Apostasy, Religious Freedom, and Human Rights*, published simultaneously in Europe and by Wipf & Stock in the USA.



During the lecture of Christine Schirmmacher

Christine Schirmmacher had been invited by Westminster Theological Seminary’s President Prof. Dr. Peter Lillback, to present the summary of her research in a special guest lecture.

Said Peter Lillback: “We need to strengthen public theology and Dr Schirmmachers research into the original texts of Muslim scholars is goal-oriented research at its best. The fight for religious liberty has to be an integral part of Christian theology.” In a faculty meeting taking place earlier the day, Lillback thanked the World Evangelical Alliance for taking the lead in questions like Islam and religious violence in a highly sophisticated way.

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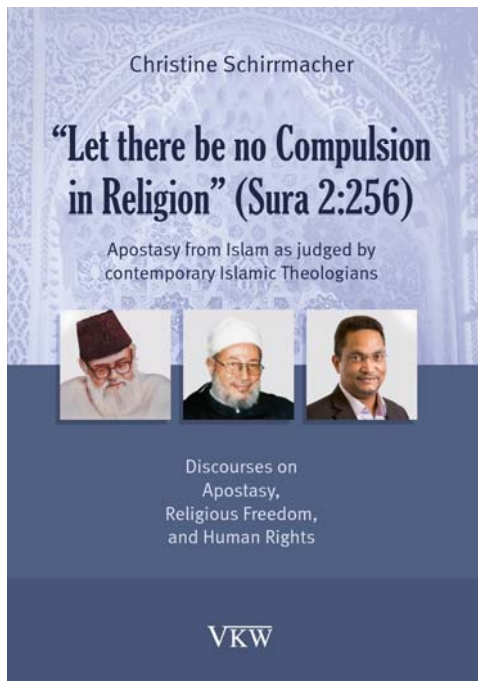
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Westminster Theological Seminary was founded in Philadelphia in 1929 as a split of from Princeton Theological Seminary. The school is regarded as the global flagship academic institution in the non-liberal Reformed community with students from around 100 countries. Like Martin Bucer European School of Theology and Research Institutes, Westminster Theological Seminary is a member of the World Reformed Fellowship.



Christine Schirmmacher was accompanied by her husband, renowned Reformed scholar Thomas Schirmmacher, President of Martin Bucer European School of Theology and Research Institutes and Chair of the Theological Commission of World Evangelical Alliance. He was scheduled to give a guest lecture at Westminster Theological Seminary on latest developments in the Catholic Church the next day.

In Christine Schirmmacher's postdoctoral thesis, for the first time one finds reviews of original voices coming from Islamic theology on the topic of religious freedom and apostasy. Arabic, English, French, and Urdu texts have been translated and analyzed and thus made accessible.

There are basically three positions which are defended on falling away from the Islamic faith: Complete advocacy of religious freedom, the complete denial of

religious freedom with a call for the immediate application of the death penalty for apostates, and the centrist position. The centrist position, however, which allows inner freedom of thought and warns against premature persecution, calls for the death penalty in the case of open apostasy (e.g., in the case of conversion to another faith). Within established Islamic theology, the latter approach is nowadays the most frequent point of view found.

These three main positions on apostasy are introduced in this postdoctoral thesis by means of the publications of three influential 20th century theologians: Yusuf al-Qaradawi (b. 1926), Abdullah Saeed (b. 1960), and Abu I-A'la Maududi (1903-1979). They all have followings of many millions of people and have political influence at their disposal.

The study explains why in many Muslim majority countries there is still today only very limited or sometimes no freedom of religion (in the sense of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948) for converts, critical intellectuals, artists and progressive Koranic studies specialists, journalists and secularists, agnostics and confessing atheists, enlightened thinkers, women's rights and human rights activists as well as adherents of non-recognized minorities.

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Prof. Dr. Christine Schirmmacher (MA in Islamic Studies 1988, Dr. phil. Islamic Studies 1991) studied Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Middle Eastern History and Islamic Studies in Gießen and Bonn, Germany. She is currently Professor of Islamic Studies at the “Evangelisch-Theologische Fakultät” (Protestant University) in Leuven/Belgium as well as at the state University of Bonn/Germany, where she teaches at the department of Islamic Studies and Middle Eastern Languages. Additionally she had guest professorships, e.g. at the State University of Erfurt (chair of Islamic Studies) and at the department of Anthro-Geo-Geography at the State University of Tübingen/Germany. Dr Schirmmacher has given guest lectures on several continents, e.g. recently at the University of Hong Kong, Sofia/Bulgaria and Brest/Belarus and has visited most countries of the Middle East.

Schirmmacher is head of the International Institute of Islamic Studies (IIS) of the World Evangelical Alliance as well as of its German speaking counterpart run by the Evangelical Alliance of Germany, Switzerland and Austria. She is “Commissioner for Islamic Affairs”, i. e., the official speaker and advisor on Islam for the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA).

Schirmmacher also lectures on Islam and security issues to the German parliament and different government institutions, eg to the Academy of Foreign Affairs Germany, is author of about 15 books on Islam some of which are translated into English, Spanish, Romanian, Korean and Swahili. She is engaged in current dialogue initiatives, like the conference “Loving God and Neighbour in Word and Deed: Implications for Muslims and Christians” of the Yale Centre for Faith and Culture, Yale University, New Haven/Connecticut, in July 2008.

Bibliographical details:

- Christine Schirmmacher. “Let there be no Compulsion in Religion” (Sura 2:256): Apostasy from Islam as judged by contemporary Islamic Theologians – Discourses on Apostasy, Religious Freedom, and Human Rights. 2016. 620 pp. Pb. 68.00 US\$. ISBN 978-1-4982-9153-8 (W&S)



Christine and Thomas Schirmmacher with President Peter Lillback under the original seal of the Westminster Theological Seminary

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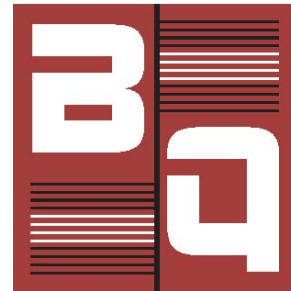
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- <http://wipfandstock.com/let-there-be-no-compulsion-in-religion-sura-2-256-apostasy-from-islam-as-judged-by-contemporary-islamic-theologians-discourses-on-apostasy-religious-freedom-and-human-rights.html>
- <http://www.amazon.com/Let-there-Compulsion-Religion-Sura/dp/1498291538/>

Further Links:

- Westminster Theological Seminary: <http://www.wts.edu>
- The original German edition of the book is available under <http://ergon-verlag.de/orientalistik/kultur-recht-und-politik/band-32.php>

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- Cover, full ([pdf](#))
- Cover, front ([jpg](#))
- [Photo 1](#), [photo 2](#): During the lecture of Christine Schirmmacher
- [Photo 3](#): Van Til-Hall, place of the lecture
- [Photo 4](#): Christine and Thomas Schirmmacher with President Peter Lillback under the original seal of the Westminster Theological Seminary

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