



The Lindisfarne Centre

For the Study of Christian Persecution

The Lindisfarne Centre for the Study of Christian Persecution is an academic research centre on the global persecution of Christians, focused particularly on Christian minorities in the Islamic world.

What's unique about the Lindisfarne Centre?

1. We are a specialist academic research centre – we are not an aid agency. We only do research. We are focused on Christian minorities in Islamic contexts, rather than seeking to do everything.
2. We don't just want to tell you WHERE Christians are being persecuted – we are also committed to explaining WHY – because only when we understand why can we respond effectively. We also seek to PREDICT which areas are likely to be at risk in future years.
3. We exist to help governments, international bodies, the legal system and media as well as Christian organisations and the general public understand both the nature and the causes of the global persecution of Christians in the Islamic world.

4. We also want to explain WHAT freedom of religion really is – not just the two examples given in article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but the 10 different aspects which previous generations across the English-speaking world gave their lives to achieve over the past 500 years. We also think it is important to remind our governments, media and fellow citizens what those are!

The name

The name Lindisfarne is used to highlight the crisis of church life and theology precipitated by the 793 AD attack on the monastery at Lindisfarne and subsequent Viking attacks on churches and Christian institutions across Britain. These attacks lasted until 1018 and almost eradicated Christianity in some regions. The name Lindisfarne highlights the broadly similar situations of violence, persecution and attempted eradication being faced by Christians today in a number of Islamic contexts such as Iraq, Northern Nigeria and Syria.

Attacks on Christian minorities continue and are geographically spreading, despite Islamic State no longer controlling large areas. They are likely to continue to do so as other Islamist groups emerge. Simply promoting what have sometimes been called 'thin' values such as 'diversity' will not provide an adequate or meaningful response. In order to develop an effective counter narrative there is a need to go back and recover the deeper values on which our society has been historically based, such as those which reflect the Judaeo-Christian belief that all people, whatever their ethnicity or faith are

made in the image of God and as such deserve respect and dignity.

Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB)

It is often forgotten that Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which deals with Freedom of Religion or Belief was a compromise statement negotiated over a two-year period. Some countries on the committee such as the UK, USA and Canada had a long heritage of Freedom of Religion, while others such as China, Saudi Arabia and the USSR did not. Consequently, the final text merely made a general statement that *"everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion"*, then gave two examples of what this included: *"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."*

This text became the basis for other statements on FoRB such as Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights did not include several important aspects of FoRB. It only dealt with the freedom of the individual and did not say anything about the right of the church to be free from government interference. Nor did it include some important aspects of Freedom of Religion which had historically developed in the countries of the English-speaking world. For example, a draft text submitted by the UK government which included the freedom *"to endeavour to persuade other persons of*

full age and sound mind of the truth of his beliefs”, was blocked by Saudi Arabia.

10 aspects of FoRB

The Lindisfarne Centre therefore additionally analyses FoRB violations in relation to those aspects of FoRB which historically developed in the UK and other countries of the English Speaking World.

Most aspects of freedom of religion developed gradually and at different rates in different countries. But we have identified 10 broad aspects:

1. Freedom of the church from state interference, including freedom to interpret scripture without government interference.
2. Freedom to translate and own scripture in the vernacular and read it publicly.
3. Freedom of worship.
4. Freedom from being required to act against one's beliefs.
5. Freedom to establish places of worship.
6. Freedom to preach and try to convince others of the truth of one's beliefs.
7. Freedom to choose or change one's faith.
8. Freedom from being required to affirm a particular worldview i.e. religious or philosophical beliefs, in order to hold public office, enter various professions or study at university (repeal of Test Acts).
9. Freedom of parents to educate children according to their own beliefs.
10. Freedom to criticise the religious or philosophical beliefs of others (absence of blasphemy law).

Many of the 10 aspects of FoRB set out above are directly challenged by historic interpretations of Islamic law (*shari'a*), such as those relating to apostasy and blasphemy.

Our analysis

The Lindisfarne Centre produces carefully researched and detailed country profiles, dealing with both the legal situation, the actions of both state and non-state actors and the underlying ideologies.

By analysing FoRB in Islamic countries against these clear criteria, we are not only saying what is wrong, but also specifically what individual governments need to do to improve FoRB in their country.

Our ethos

The Lindisfarne Centre has an evangelical ethos as set out in its basis of faith. However, it seeks to research and report on the persecution of Christians of all denominations.

Research Ethics

We have a detailed policy which sets out similar standards of Research Ethics to those followed by leading universities, but adapted to address specific issues that arise in relation to research on persecution of Christians.

CEO

Dr Martin Parsons has a PhD in Christian and Islamic Theology and is the author of two academic books.

He has also lived and worked in two Islamic countries where Christians faced discrimination or persecution. Martin has also acted as an expert witness in a number of high-profile court cases involving freedom of religion for Christians. He is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA) and a member of the Academy of Experts (MAE).

Website

www.christianpersecution.co.uk

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