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# Executive Summary

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## The State and Religious Persecution: The global rise of secular and religious restriction and their impact on missions

Thomas Harvey

According to the *Pew Report on The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050*, North America and Western Europe are becoming increasingly secular, even as Christianity and Islam rise in the Global South and East. With this intensification and polarisation of religions and irreligion globally has come political pressure upon governments to embrace a religious or secular national ideology.

A second Pew report *Latest Trends in Religious Restrictions and Hostilities* documents a concomitant increase of official intolerance and restriction of minority religious faiths to unprecedented levels.

The report notes that official intolerance, legal sanction, harassment, and outright persecution of minority religious communities are far more likely in countries where one religion or ideology dominates socially and politically. However, it also documents the growing intolerance toward faiths in secular Europe.

Religious and secular intolerance of minority religious expression are manifest in 39% of all nations, with some 5.5 billion people now living in countries with high or very high levels of restrictions upon religion—or 77% of the world's population.

The common denominator in official sanction of religious minorities is not simply a matter of religion per se. It has arisen in nations as ideologically and religiously diverse as China, Saudi Arabia, North Korea, Burma, Vietnam, Sudan, and Pakistan.

What appears to be the inner logic that justifies it has much to do with national identity and ideology, whether that is secular or religious. In states where religious or ideological exclusivity is enforced, questioning the prevailing religious or ideological identity is often seen as potentially subversive. The assumed superiority of the ruling belief system leads to a questioning of motives behind any alternative religious or ideological framework.

Christianity is growing rapidly in the Global South and East, where it is a distinct minority. This growth is being met with greater restrictions and growing hostility toward Christian mission and evangelism. As religious and ideological exclusivity grow, so will greater restrictions upon mission work as well as social hostility and even violence against missionaries and their converts.

Although opposition to evangelical Christian perspectives in secular nations is couched in the language of tolerance and diversity, the result is increasing restriction upon evangelicals to order their lives and their institutions according to their traditions and conscience.

In the long term, it appears that religious and ideological exclusivity, religious restrictions, social hostility, abuse, and even violence against Christianity around the globe will rise.

The temptation legally to restrict minority religious and political competitors is great in all societies and within all religions. Nonetheless, such moves carry with them unintended consequences. Because human rights are part of the complex web of rights that inform and strengthen civil society and democratic governance, restricting or showing hostility to one affects the others.

For evangelical Christians, Christian institutions, and Christian missions, awareness of the tendency of restriction and some of the underlying causes of religious discrimination should serve to forewarn and forearm.

An evangelical emphasis on nurturing societies that encourage openness, tolerance, and diversity of religious expression should be seen as a benefit to all citizens and beneficial to mission and ministry globally.

Hence it would be prudent for evangelicals reach out to and establish strategic alliances with civil libertarians and groups advocating human rights—especially those arguing for freedom of religion.

There are deep wells of Christian tradition that can be tapped in this endeavour. Historically, emphasis upon 'freedom of conscience' developed within Protestantism with its insistence that 'God alone is Lord of the conscience'. Accordingly, human conscience is ultimately subject to God and not to any human or religious ideology.

Such an appeal requires a commitment to acknowledge and affirm the need for tolerance and diversity even where Christians represent a large majority. The question is whether evangelical Christians and their secular antagonists are willing to re-appropriate that tolerance in an age of increasing hostility to minority religious expression globally.

## **A Profile of North American Messianic Jews: Implications for global mission**

Andrew Barron

In 2013, I spearheaded a broad study of Messianic Jews in North America as a follow-up to a similar study done in 1983. The 2013 study involved a sample of 1,567 respondents and, like its predecessor, sought to give a picture of the evolving Messianic movement for the purpose of resourcing that community as well as the greater missions community. In addition, my hope was to stimulate strategies for outreach, fellowship, and edification.

The quantitative questions I posed to the participants covered age, family background, education, religious observance, and vocation. The qualitative questions covered experiences in personal journeys and the impact of their faith decisions in relation to friends, families, and communities of this group.

Most Jewish people today continue to resist the message of Jesus. My qualitative research attempted to understand this resistance in relation to the hardening of Israel (Rom 11:25). Paul understands this phenomenon as a warning (verse 25a), a mystery (v 25b), partial (v 25c), and temporary (v 25d, v26a). Part of my research attempts to understand hardening as a genuine and current experience, and I was able to demonstrate that hardening is interlaced into what I call an Implied Social Contract (ISC).

This type of contract is an agreement among a group of people that is never explicitly articulated. In other words, certain behavior is implied as normative; yet there is no formal law governing such norms. My research showed how this ISC is a way to understand and frame contemporary reflections on Jewish culture and the ways in which the Jewish community has found unity in its resistance to the Gospel. Understanding the conversation of the ISC shows an unspoken norm within Jewish culture.

That ethnic Israel has survived seems to be related to this phenomenon. Hardening serves a bewildering purpose: not only does it keep my people away from the Gospel; it also assists as a protection and preservation mechanism.

The Jewish philosopher Simon Rawidowicz argues that Jewish survival is always under threat. Self-preservation, he argues, has become the prime value of Jewish culture. Hardening is related to this impulse.

Responses to my qualitative questions showed that many respondents experienced adversity. They called it many things: social control, guilt, shame, hardening, and loss of prestige. Today Jewish people in North America are continuing to experience adversity as they hear and respond to the Gospel.

Of the 24 people in the group, two were disowned; two experienced religious control; three lost job opportunities; three were uninvited to family/community events; and five experienced psychological control.

Issues surrounding cultural guidelines and social control are familiar to anyone involved in cross-cultural missions. The particular issues I face in Jewish mission resemble common phenomena that vary from society to society. Loss of categories, secularism, and urbanization are changing the way younger generations are experiencing social control. I believe that the concerns which flow from my research are foundational to global mission concerns.

In addition to absorbing and applying these lessons, we must not be afraid to ask these questions:

1. Is our material relevant to the group receiving the message rather than those bringing it? Is our material bound by our culture or designed for the people and paradigms of the societies we are speaking to?
2. Are we talking to the people we should be talking to?
3. Do we have the courage to face hardship and opposition?

4. Are we willing to exercise critical judgment regarding material, methods, and projects used?  
Do they work now? Can we assess and/or measure?

Appropriate and relevant speech affirms the dignity of all people. Communication must be tied to the consciousness of the hearers. This principle is at the heart of contextual ministry.

## The Restorative Economy: Poverty, the future of the earth, and the role of the Christian

Richard Gower

In September, world leaders in New York adopted 'The Global Goals' affirming their commitment to a better world: free from poverty, with a restored environment, peace, and equality. However, few appear prepared to face up to the scale of change required to meet these ambitious targets. As Christians, are we prepared to step into the breach?

Over the last 25 years, humanity has made huge progress. However, a billion people remain mired in extreme poverty. Furthermore, they are most at-risk from further damage to planet Earth's life support systems.

As humanity consumes more and more of the earth's natural resources, we are placing ever greater stress on the ecosystems that support life. The 2012 Lausanne Consultation in Jamaica concluded that 'we are faced with [an environmental] crisis that is pressing, urgent, and that must be resolved in our generation'.

Scripture presents us with a holistic vision for the whole of creation. The hope of the gospel is in the restoration of all things. In the beginning, we see a creation characterised by *shalom*. *Shalom* is broken because of human sin and rebellion, and is restored through Jesus' death and resurrection, but not yet fully revealed in the world. We hope for and work towards restoration of *shalom*.

The Old Testament Jubilee system offers a glimpse of the outworking of *shalom* in economic terms. The 'Restorative Economy' is an economic model in which all of us can participate as creative producers rather than simply passive consumers.

It would keep within environmental limits. It would safeguard everyone's ability to meet their basic needs. It would recognise our central need for relationship, including provision of Sabbaths. It would keep inequality within reasonable limits. Under the Jubilee system, land ownership was reset to its initial per capita distribution every 50 years. This provided equality of opportunity.

The Jubilee system offers a model for us today. While markets and trade are part of—and key to—reducing poverty, Jubilee principles ensure that human welfare and the wholeness of creation are not made subservient to them. We need to find modern-day expressions of these principles.

Many of us already give money to organisations that are battling against poverty, environmental degradation, inequality, or abuse of power. However, overcoming these problems requires changes to our lifestyles as well as our money, and to government policies.

The lesson of history is that convincing governments to make big systemic changes requires a broader shift in society's values. Change starts with us, and our lifestyles, and relies on the creation of a passionate movement for change, not just behind-the-scenes lobbying by professionals.

Faced with the scale of the challenges, our own individual actions can seem insignificant. However, the challenge today is little different from that faced by Christian campaigners who changed attitudes to slavery, civil rights, votes and education for women, and debt forgiveness.

Christians have excelled at making the moral case for change, because we have a rich set of values to draw on in Scripture. History teaches us that it is moral arguments that often persuade people to change their attitude. Slavery, child labour, and debt forgiveness are now seen through a moral rather than economic lens.

We can use our power as voters, citizens, and consumers. We can protest. In the past, Christians have been masters of prophetic protest and political theatre. We can change how we respond to poverty, brokenness, and environmental issues in our own lives by living more simply, staying within our fair share of the world's resources, and responding to poverty with radical generosity. Finally, we

can pray. Prayerful communities of disciples have throughout history had a much greater impact on society than they could have asked or imagined.

Today too, prayer, protest, and lifestyle change can accelerate change in government policy and give humanity a chance to meet the lofty ambitions of the Global Goals.

## Mission in Europe 25 Years After the Fall of the Berlin Wall

Darrell Jackson

This article attempts to capture something of the most significant developments of the last quarter of a century in Europe and then to outline and review some of the main implications that these changes continue to pose to evangelical mission agencies and their related church communities.

For much of the post-war period through until the late 1980s, Europe's internal conflicts were generally framed in a way that opposed the 'East' with the 'West'. Of course, this obscured tensions and conflict internal to each of these two European regions, tensions that would later emerge with lethal consequences in the countries of the Balkans.

When the overly simplistic East-West account of European identity collapsed, a vacuum emerged in which it was possible for powerful and lethal tribalism to emerge around the notions of newly emerging nations. Of course the aspiration to nationhood and self-determination is not always malignant. As some 'Eastern' countries addressed their self-identification, they quickly embraced the language of 'Central Europe', allowing them to jettison the old socialist-era language of 'the East' and to forge a common sense of regional identity and shared purpose.

As the European Union extended its borders with the accession of new member states in 2004, 2007, and 2013, citizens of all 28 EU countries gained the freedom to live and work across the entire EU community. In each EU country, with this new freedom to migrate, populations are beginning to experience new forms of internal ethnic and national diversity. In some instances, this factor has fuelled ethnic and nationalist tensions.

For citizens of a majority of EU states, the Schengen Agreement has guaranteed the freedom of unrestricted passage across national borders that are internal to the Schengen Zone. EU citizens have the right to reside, work, and conduct business in any one of the EU's member states. This has contributed to healthy patterns of cultural and religious diversity. However, as the scale of non-EU migration into Europe accelerated across 2014-2015, several member states enacted unilateral measures intended to control the entry of migrants into their territory, including the erection of border fences.

The presence of immigrants in Europe has accelerated its cultural and religious diversity and prompted new policy and political responses. With cultural diversity came religious diversity and an increasing European sensitivity towards Islam, particularly in the form of the more radical Muslim groups. The secular 1970s did not prepare Europe well for the religious vitality that would become all too apparent during the late 1990s and onwards.

Over the last 25 years, there seems to have been a sober re-assessment of the evangelical euphoria that was apparent during the early 1990s in Central and Eastern Europe. These early years saw an unprecedented openness to the Gospel, new religious freedoms, and a plethora of church planting ministries, Bible and literature distribution, social ministries, and evangelistic initiatives. This was bolstered by the arrival of large numbers of foreign missionaries. Effective partnerships led to the establishing of many more local evangelical congregations in parts of Europe.

The missionary activity of recent years has become more sensitive to the local context. Church planting from the West has lost the appeal of its novelty. Sustained and longer-term approaches are seen to be more appropriate. There are also, for example, innovative examples of evangelical co-operation with traditional churches.

In taking seriously their missionary commitment to Europe, there are also Christian churches and individuals who understand the need to engage their Christian worldview with the largely secular corridors of political, economic, cultural, social, and educational power. The European Union and its

Commission are now required to serve and reflect the interests of 28 countries. Many of these are much more 'non-secular' than the pre-2004 'club of 15'.

Engaging with European institutions will remain problematic for evangelicals and other people of faith but it does at least open up the possibility of another way of re-introducing the people of Europe to a convincing and compelling account of the Christian faith and the witness it gives to the Gospel of Jesus.

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