



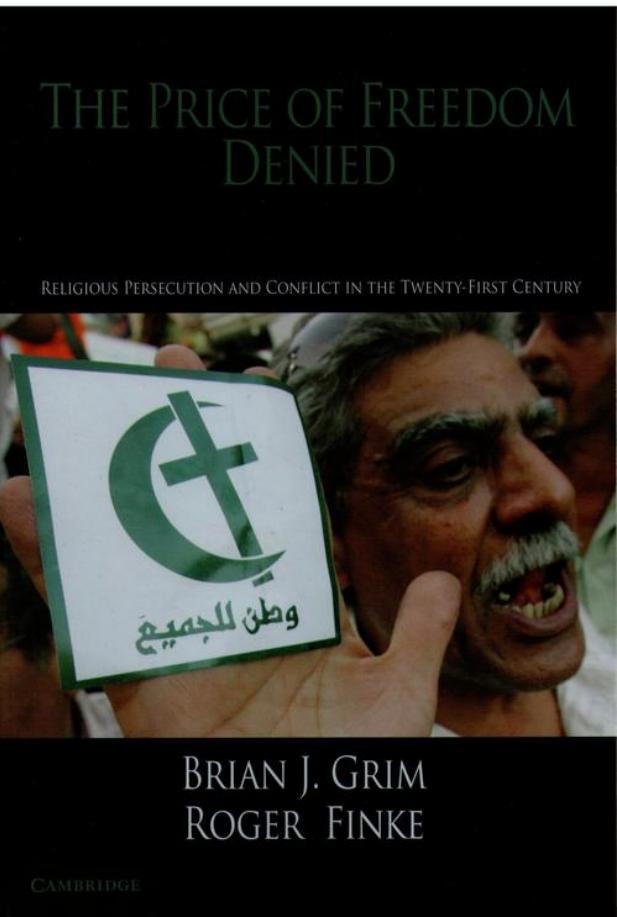
## Christians: A Persecuted Minority?

Contemporary Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians

Above: Aert van den Bossche (late 15<sup>th</sup> cent.),  
*The Martyrdom of the Saints Crispin and Crispinian*

Massimo Introvigne  
Baylor University, Waco, Texas  
November 2, 2016

# The Price of Freedom Denied



- ▶ In 2010, Brian Grim and Roger Finke, developing early insights by Rodney Stark, demonstrated that religious liberty is a social resource directly connected to prosperity and development. Only societies where religious liberty is guaranteed have a real chance to prosper

# The State of Religious Liberty



Nigeria: Christians killed by Boko Haram

- ▶ The same authors, however, noted both the sad status of religious liberty throughout the world and the fact that many killed today because of their faith are Christian
- ▶ Obviously, religious liberty is indivisible: those who speak out for the religious freedom of the Christians are credible only if they defend the liberty of all faiths. And we should also remember that, in recent years, most of those killed for their faith were Muslims killed by other Muslims

# My OSCE Experience

**Chairmanship**

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**CiO Representatives to promote tolerance**

Personal Representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office to promote greater tolerance and combat racism, xenophobia and discrimination

**Rabbi Andrew Baker**  
Personal Representative on Combating Anti-Semitism

Rabbi Andrew Baker is director of International Jewish Affairs at the American Jewish Committee (AJC), which he joined in 1979. A leading expert on anti-Semitism in Europe, he travels extensively to strengthen relations between the AJC and Jewish communities worldwide. Throughout most of the 1990s, as director of European Affairs, Rabbi Baker promoted tolerance in the emerging democracies of Central and Eastern Europe. He is active in Holocaust restitution issues and in 2003 was awarded the Officer's Cross of the Order of Merit by Germany for his work in German-Jewish relations.



**Ambassador Adil Akhmetov**  
Personal Representative on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims

Following a decision by the Chairperson-in-Office, Ambassador Adil Akhmetov of Kazakhstan was appointed as Personal Representative on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims in April 2009. Ambassador Akhmetov is Secretary of the Committee on International Relations, Defence and Security, and a Member of the Senate of the Parliament of Kazakhstan. His previous positions include First Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chairman of the Committee on Education of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Healthcare, and Envoy Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Kazakhstan to the UK.



**Massimo Introvigne**  
Personal Representative on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, also focusing on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians and Members of Other Religions

Massimo Introvigne was born in Rome in 1955. A sociologist of religion, he has lectured in several universities both in Italy and abroad, and is the author of more than sixty books and more than one hundred articles in academic



**OSCE**  
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**Links**

- Documents and resources related to the Personal Representatives, available on the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Information System (TANDIS)

**Contacts**

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► My subject today, however, is denial of religious liberty to Christians. It is also based on a personal experience. In 2011, I served as Representative of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, of which the U.S. are also a member) for combating racism, xenophobia, and intolerance and discrimination against Christians and members of other religions (two other OSCE representatives dealt with anti-Semitism and Islamophobia)

# Killing Fields



► I kept on my desk at OSCE this disturbing image, which I received from a missionary in Indonesia (later, it circulated on the Web). It represents two of three Christian girls, Theresia, 15, and Alfita and Yarni, 17, beheaded by terrorists in Poso, Sulawesi, Indonesia on October 30, 2005. Their only crime was attending a Christian school. The image reminded me that we were dealing with real people tortured and killed, not only with subtler forms of discrimination

# Numbers



- ▶ And those killed are many. In Nigeria, in the last 12 years, the most reliable estimates assess at more than 10,000 the Christians killed by the Islamic ultra-fundamentalist organization Boko Haram

# Statistics



- ▶ How many, exactly? A leading, although not uncontroversial, expert of religious statistics was David B. Barrett (left, 1927-2011)
- ▶ He calculated that, from the death of Jesus Christ to the year 2000, 75 million Christians were killed for their faith. 45 million were killed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that, alone, was more lethal for Christians than all the previous centuries taken together

# Communism

- ▶ Barrett argued that, among these 45 million, 30 million Christians were killed by Communist regimes, a tragedy younger generations today often forget
- ▶ The image shows what was left after the Khmer Rouge attacked a Christian village in Cambodia



# Killing Fields, Continued

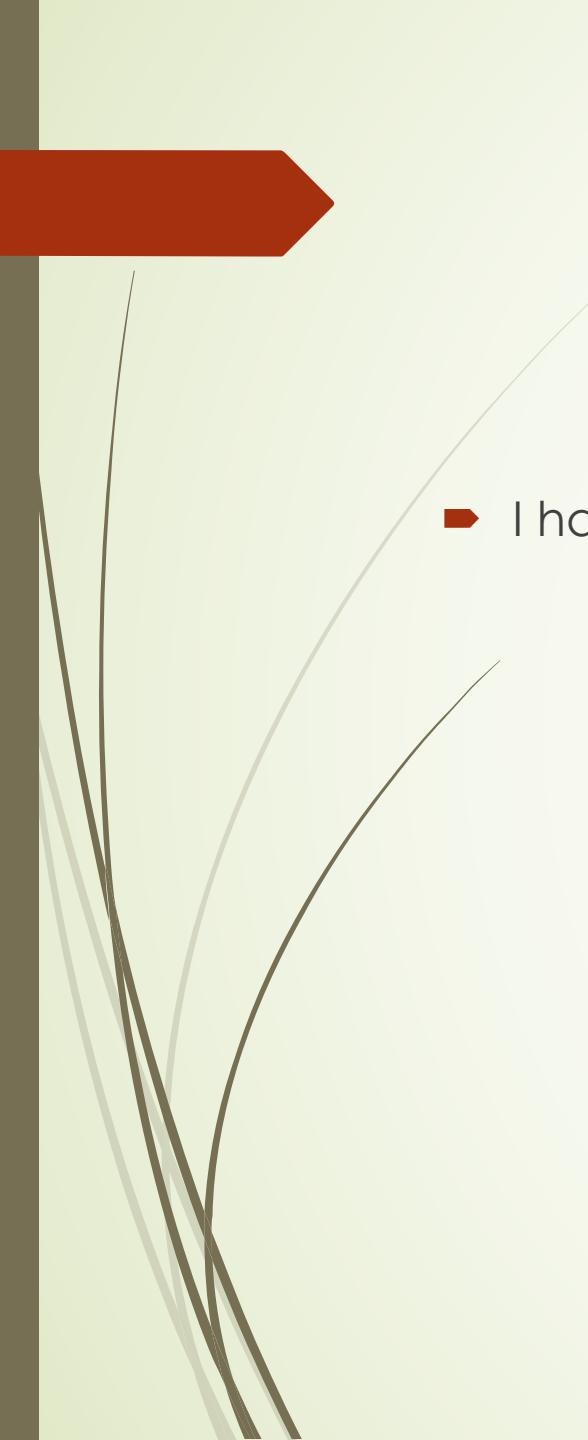


- ▶ Barrett and his co-workers and successors continued offering statistics for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These statistics are controversial, and all depends on how the notions of victims “killed for their faith” is defined
- ▶ Although estimates may, accordingly, vary, there is little doubt that persecution of Christians is a continuing and serious problem. Sunil Masih (1986-2011, left), was a Pakistani Catholic lynched after having “disgraced” his village by participating in a Marian pilgrimage. His case was unfortunately not isolated

# Homicides without Killers?

- ▶ During my OSCE mandate, I addressed on the issue of persecuted Christians several international diplomatic gatherings. It was never difficult to elicit sympathy for the victims. It was much more difficult to talk freely about their persecutors. They might be dangerous nuclear powers such as North Korea (right), or important commercial partners of the West. Obviously, however, the Christians killed were not victims of earthquakes or tsunamis. Where there is a killing, there should be a killer





# Four Suspects

- ▶ I had to insist that killers do exist. And I mentioned four suspects:
  - ▶ **Islamic Ultra-Fundamentalism**
  - ▶ **Communism's Last Salvoes**
  - ▶ **Ethno-Religious Nationalisms**
  - ▶ **The West's Own Problems**

# 1. Islamic Ultra-Fundamentalism



- ▶ At the OSCE, I had a colleague in charge of combating “Islamophobia.” We often traveled together and had several interesting discussions. I believe that considering every Muslim a terrorist is, indeed, Islamophobia. But there is no Islamophobia in noting that a small radical subculture within the larger Islamic fundamentalist movement advocates and promotes terrorism and the killing of other Muslims, Christians, and members of other religious minorities

# Boko Haram, ISIS, and Co.



- ▶ Both the Islamic State (ISIS) and Nigeria's Boko Haram (one faction of which is affiliated with ISIS) do theorize that Christians (and members of other minorities) living in Islamic territories should be offered the alternative of converting to Islam, leave, or die. Boko Haram attacks have made going to a Christian service on Sunday in the parts of Nigeria where they operate a very dangerous exercise

# Laws That Kill



- ▶ Boko Haram is a private organization. The Nigerian government tries to eradicate it. However, in some countries, persecution of Christians is actually promoted by the governments. Several Muslim countries still have laws punishing apostasy, i.e. converting from Islam to another religion. Others have laws against blasphemy, and some tend to consider any criticism of Islam as blasphemy

# The Asia Bibi Saga

- ▶ The case of Asia Bibi in Pakistan is a well-known instance of application of blasphemy laws. In 2009, in a discussion with other women, Bibi, a Christian, argued that Jesus was a more compassionate prophet than Muhammad, especially towards women. She was arrested, prosecuted for blasphemy and in 2010 sentenced to death by hanging. International campaigns on her behalf led to the suspension of the sentence, and the Pakistani Supreme Court is currently reviewing her case



# Death of a Politician: Shahbaz Bhatti



- ▶ After the Bibi case, leading Pakistani politicians called for the abolishment of the anti-blasphemy law, but immediately became themselves targets of radicalism. Punjab's governor, Salmaan Taseer (1944-2011), was killed on January 4, 2011. On March 2, 2011 Shahbaz Bhatti (1968-2011), the Catholic Minister of religious minorities in the Pakistani government, was in turn killed in a terrorist attack

# “We Will Slaughter the Apostates”

- ▶ In 2003, Sheikh Nur Barud, vice-chairman of an Islamic ultra-fundamentalist group in Somalia, stated in an interview that “a Muslim can never become a Christian but he can become an apostate. Such people do not have a place in Somalia, and we will never recognize their existence and we will slaughter them”
- ▶ Somalia is one of the countries where Christians such as Galed Jama Muktar (1994-2011, right), have been beheaded as “apostates” by Islamic ultra-fundamentalists, with videos of the killings posted on the Web



## 2. Still Communist: North Korea



- ▶ The great communist persecutions of Christians in Eastern Europe are a thing of the past. But there are still Communist countries such as North Korea where it is very dangerous to be a Christian. According to both the Protestant Open Doors and the Catholic Aid to the Church in Need, Christian victims of the North Korean Communist regime from 1948 may be as high as 300,000, or 1,3% of the total population of the country, and this without including the discrimination of Christian communities in the frequent famines (left)

# The Many Problems of China

- ▶ The situation in China is complicated, and media often reports on Christian there through generalizations. Although there have been improvements, at times followed by a retrenchment by the regime, Chinese laws still restrict religious liberty to government-approved organizations. Catholics, in particular, must belong to the Catholic Patriotic Association controlled by the regime. The Vatican supports an underground independent Catholic Church, although a cautious dialogue between the two Catholic Churches, and between the Vatican and Beijing, has now started



### 3. Religious Ethno-Nationalisms



- ▶ On January 22, 1999, Evangelical Australian missionary Graham Stuart Staines (1941-1999), who had been honored by the Indian government for his work with the lepers, was locked in his car with his sons, Philip, 10, and Timothy, 6, by a mob of Hindu extremists who then set fire to the vehicle, burning Staines and his children alive
- ▶ The crime was committed in the Indian State of Orissa, where several Catholic priests were also burned alive. For the most extreme Hindu nationalists, every Indian who converts to Christianity betrays the country

# Sri Lanka: Killing “Christian Devils”

- ▶ Although obviously most Buddhists are firmly opposed to violence, in Sri Lanka, within the context of the civil war, both Buddhist and Hindu militias targeted Christian and Muslim minorities. The presence of the “Christian devils” was even mentioned as a reason for the wrath of the gods, causing the 2004 tsunami. 250 churches were destroyed. In 2008, Catholic priest and human right activist, Mariampillai Xavier Karunaratnan (1961-2008, right), was killed in a terrorist attack



# Anti-Proselytization Laws



- ▶ Much less dramatic than terrorist attacks and killings, laws restricting religious liberty in the name of nationalism are also a cause for concern. Nine Indian states passed laws making attempts to convert Hindus to another religion either illegal or subject to heavy restrictions. Russia also passed anti-proselytization laws, culminating in the provision of the Yarovaya laws of 2016 (left, signed by President Putin) making it illegal for religious minorities to proselyte outside the internal perimeters of their places of worship

# Raiding Jehovah's Witnesses



► Jehovah's Witnesses became a preferred target of Russian anti-proselytization laws. In 2016, their premises were raided on average more than three times per month by heavily armed riot police, occasionally supported by anti-Witnesses street protesters (Rostov, left). Local congregations of the Witnesses were "liquidated," and they are afraid that their religion may be banned altogether in Russia

# Nationalism and Restrictive Laws



- ▶ Although the Russian Orthodox Church is open to discuss issues of religious liberty (right, meeting between Patriarch Kirill and myself in my OSCE times), the Yarovaya laws were passed in a climate marked by an increasing religious nationalism in Russia. Both Orthodox and governmental milieus considered the missionary activities, particularly of American Protestant and other U.S.-based groups, as a direct attack against the traditional identity of Russia

## 4. Problems Exist in the West Too

- It would be a gross exaggeration to put on an equal footing certain forms of discriminations of Christians in the West and the tortures and killings prevailing in some parts of Africa and Asia. Without comparing realities of a very different degree of gravity, we can however recognize that not all is well in the West either (right: statue destroyed during the “Occupy Rome” rally of October 15, 2011)



# The Rome Conference (2011)



- ▶ On September 12, 2011, OSCE organized in Rome a conference that I had proposed on *Hate Incidents and Crimes against Christians* - it referred to the OSCE area, i.e. mostly to the West
- ▶ It was a successful and hopeful event, with a very significant media coverage in Italy and internationally



# The Rome Model

- At the Rome Conference I introduced what was later called the “Rome Model,” predicting a slippery slope:

Intolerance



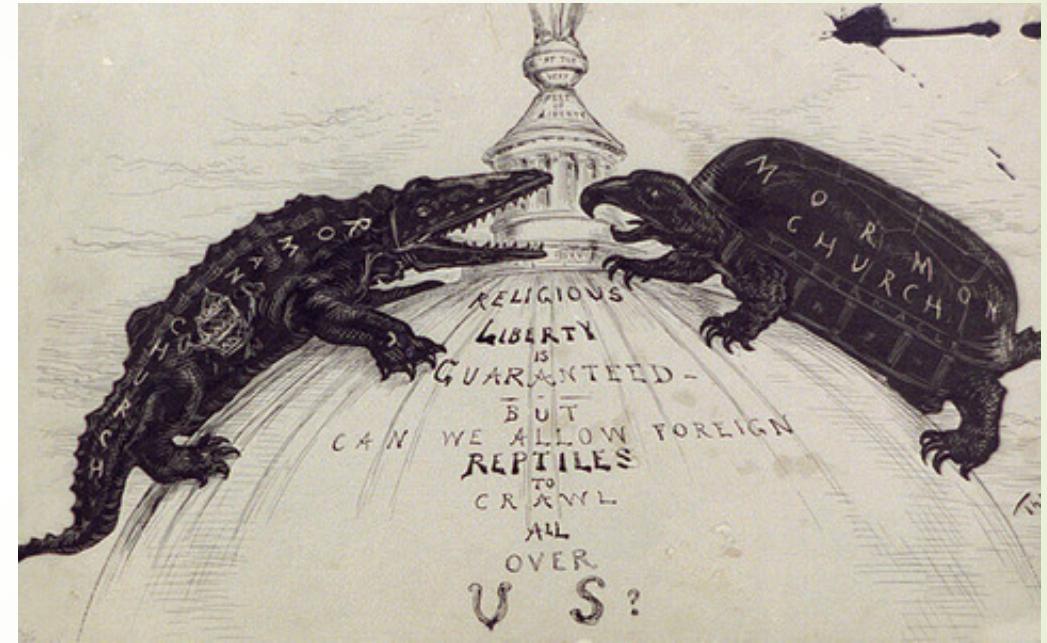
Discrimination



Hate Crimes

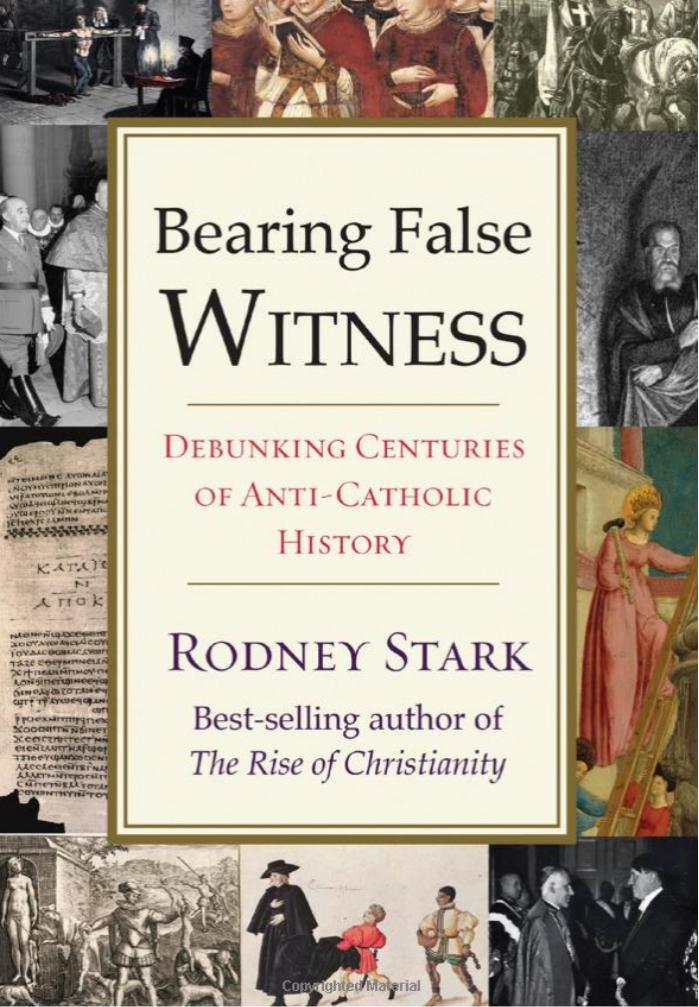
# 1. Intolerance

- ▶ The Rome Model used the example of hate crimes against Christians, but is valid for all cases where a “spiral of intolerance” is at work
- ▶ Intolerance is a cultural phenomenon: a group is ridiculed through stereotypes, depicted as malignant, evil, an obstacle to happiness and progress



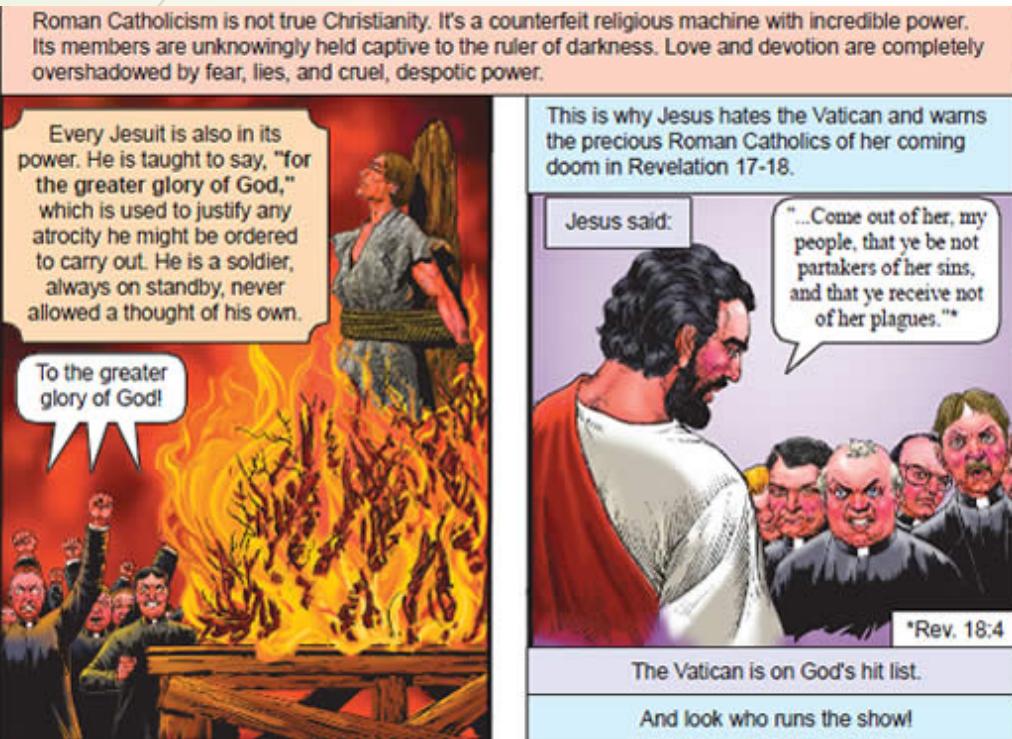
Anti-Catholic and anti-Mormon cartoon by the famous cartoonist Thomas Nast (1840-1902)

# Intolerant History



- As Rodney Stark has demonstrated, history can be used as a weapon of intolerance through distortions, exaggerations and plain falsehoods. Anti-Catholicism, in particular, has often used history as an offensive tool for promoting intolerance

# Intolerant Popular Culture



- ▶ Anti-Catholicism is a good example of how popular culture may be mobilized as a resource for spreading intolerance. California editor and evangelist Jack T. Chick (1924-2016) became legendary for anti-Catholic comics, and for hundreds of other comics and tracts against any groups he regarded as heretic “cults” from his own evangelical fundamentalist point of view

# Intolerant Art



- ▶ Obviously, artistic freedom is important. In certain cases, however, the arts may become an instrument of intolerance (e.g. Nazi artists depicting the Jews as evil)
- ▶ Where are the limits? Some Christians felt offended by the American artist Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* (1987, left: the crucifix is submerged by the artist's own urine). Others accepted it as legitimate contemporary art

# Bergoglio vs Ferrari



- ▶ In Argentina, a conflict arose in 2004 between postmodernist artist Léon Ferrari (1920-2013, above) and Buenos Aires' cardinal Bergoglio, the present Pope. He called Ferrari's works "a shame" and "blasphemy," and supported a court action to stop the exhibition of some of them. Little doubt remained, on the other hand, that Ferrari was one of the leading Argentinian artists of his generation, and recently Pope Francis somewhat softened his judgement of him

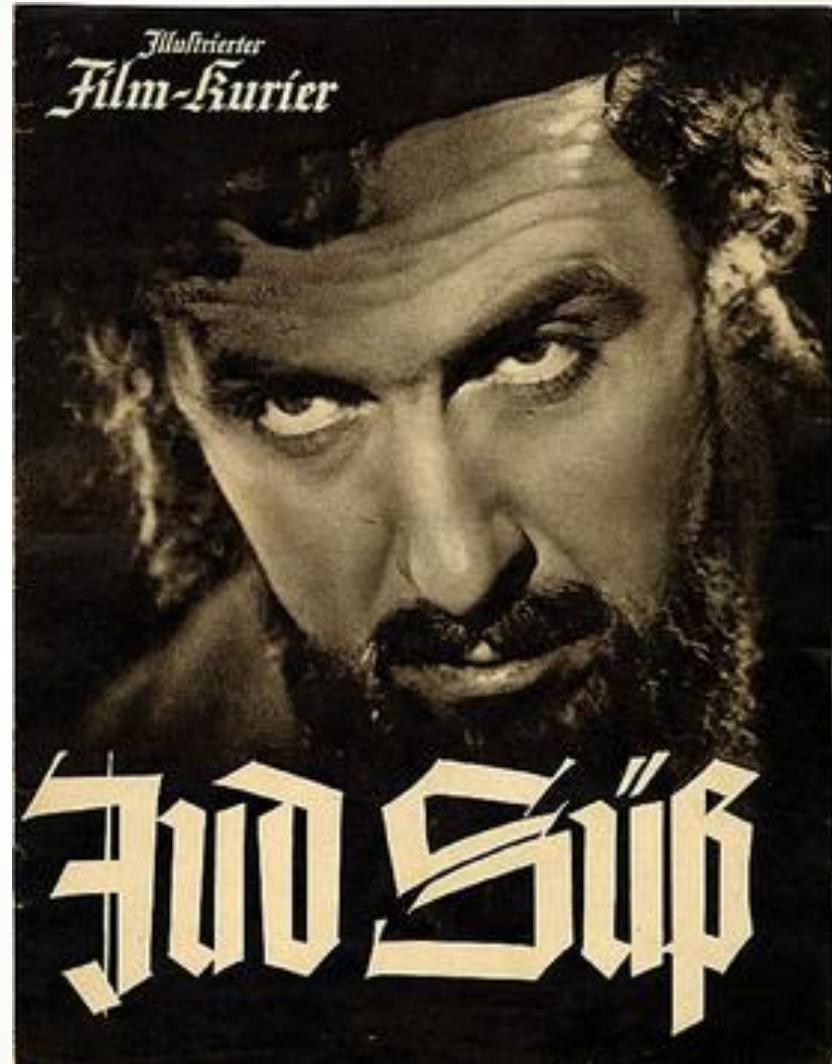


## "Je suis Charlie"?

- ▶ All these cases were overshadowed by the Charlie Hebdo controversy and the tragic 2015 terrorist attacks. There can be no justification for terrorism and assassinations. However, the question whether some of the Charlie Hebdo cartoons were themselves intolerant remains

## SÜß the Jew (1940)

- We all cherish freedom of expression and freedom of the arts. However, there is a serious question whether art can become itself part of campaigns for intolerance
- An egregious example is the Nazi movie *Jud Süß* (1940). It was a professionally produced movie, whose only aim was, however, to promote intolerance against the Jews



## 2. Discrimination



- ▶ In the Rome Model, intolerance is soon followed by discrimination, a legal process. If a group or organization is evil, we need laws against it
- ▶ In fact, in several Western countries there are laws restricting the freedom of at least some religious groups

# “Cults”



- ▶ Today, religious liberty is also put at test by the presence of hundreds of small, unpopular and “strange” groups, a fruit of postmodern religious pluralism and the collapse of grand, unifying religious narratives
- ▶ Scholars call them “new religious movements” but the media prefer to label them with the derogatory word “cults.” Many so called “cults” are, in fact, direct or indirect offshoots of Christianity

# Anti-Cult Campaigns



- ▶ After some (very real, and sometimes tragic) incidents involving some religious groups, in several European countries anti-cult movements and rallies were organized, and official action against “cults” was taken. While some measures were justified by the criminal actions of certain “cults,” there was also the risk of discriminating against dozens of small religious groups, perhaps “bizarre” and unpopular but not violent nor criminal

# Moral Panics



- ▶ The case of cults illustrates the sociological notion of “moral panic,” defined by South African sociologist Stanley Cohen (1942-2013, left) and further developed by Philip Jenkins
- ▶ Moral panics start from real (i.e. not imaginary) problems connected with some groups
- ▶ However, the prevalence of the problem is exaggerated through folk statistics, and negative actions by some individuals are attributed to the whole group

# Real Problems

- ▶ Some “cults” do commit crimes. In 1994-1997, mass suicides and homicides of a group called Order of the Solar Temple killed 74 in Switzerland, France, and Quebec (right). These and other similar tragedies explain the social concern about “cults”
- ▶ Moral panics do not invent problems. But they amplify them through generalizations, and criticism appropriate for one or more particular groups is generalized against all “bizarre” religious minorities



# Discrimination: not only “cults”



- ▶ “Cults” are not the only religious groups based directly or indirectly on Christianity complaining that they are discriminated in the West. Evangelical Christians frequently bring cases of alleged discrimination to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)
- ▶ In *Eweida* (2013), ECHR allowed Ms. Nadia Eweida (left) to wear a small cross at a British Airways check-in counter – but in the same day the Court said in *Chaplin* (2013) that similar crosses are not allowed in public hospitals

# Conscientious Objection

- ▶ Conscientious objection remains a very controversial area. In *Ladele* (2013), ECHR concluded that conscientious objection by a British Christian municipal registrar, Lilian Ladele (right), against the celebration of same-sex civil unions was not allowed (an appeal was not admitted), where other cases admitted conscientious objection by doctors against abortion



# Flowers, Cakes, and Evangelicals



- ▶ Cases like *Ladele* are similar, but not identical, to well-known U.S. cases, which are at the origins of controversial law proposals on religious liberty, including *Arlene's Flowers* (2015). These cases involved Evangelical photographers, florists, or bakers who refused to provide services connected with same-sex marriages. While these were owners of *private* businesses, Ms. Ladele was a public servant (her case is more similar to the one of Kim Davis in Kentucky)

# Interference in a Religion's Internal Affairs



- ▶ In the case of *Sindicatul* (2012), ECHR tried to compel the Romanian Orthodox Church to authorize the legal incorporation of an union of Orthodox priests independent from the bishops
- ▶ Several religious bodies and the Holy See protested, claiming that the decision implied an interference in the internal affairs of a religion. In 2013, the *Sindicatul* decision was overturned on appeal

# Registration and Discrimination



- ▶ According to studies by sociologist James T. Richardson and others, in at least a third of OSCE participating states provisions calling for registration of religious groups have a discriminatory effect against small or unpopular groups, many of them Christian
- ▶ While a legitimate concern about really dangerous “cults” and radical or violent groups might have originally motivated these provisions, there is a real risk that they also discriminate against legitimate and non-violent religious movements and churches

### 3. Hate Crimes

- ▶ The third stage of the spiral of intolerance leads from discrimination to persecution and hate crimes. If discrimination fails to suppress the “evil” group or organization, it is not surprising that radicals may decide to take the law in their own hands and resort to actual violence



«Burn Your Church»

# Fascism vs Pentecostals



- In Italy, the Fascist regime passed laws against the Pentecostals, whose religion was regarded as “a threat to racial purity.” Both arrests and hate crimes against Pentecostals followed
- On July 28, 2014, Pope Francis visited the Pentecostal Church of the Reconciliation in Caserta, Italy. He apologized to the Pentecostals for the Catholic support to fascist persecution and for the cavalier use of the word “cult”

# The Purple Triangles



- Notwithstanding an initial attempt, similar to what other religions did, to come to terms with the Nazi regime, in the end 11,300 Jehovah's Witnesses were sent to concentration camps, where 1,490 died
- Unlike Jews or Roma (gypsies), targeted for ethnical reasons, Jehovah's Witnesses were allowed to return home from the camps by simply renouncing their faith. But only a handful of them accepted the offer

# Hate Crimes against Christians



- ▶ Today, hate crimes against Christians do not occur only in Africa or Asia. The independent Vienna Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians documented hundreds of cases: churches vandalized, statues destroyed or decapitated (Malaga, Spain, 2013: left), priests and even bishops attacked

# Femen



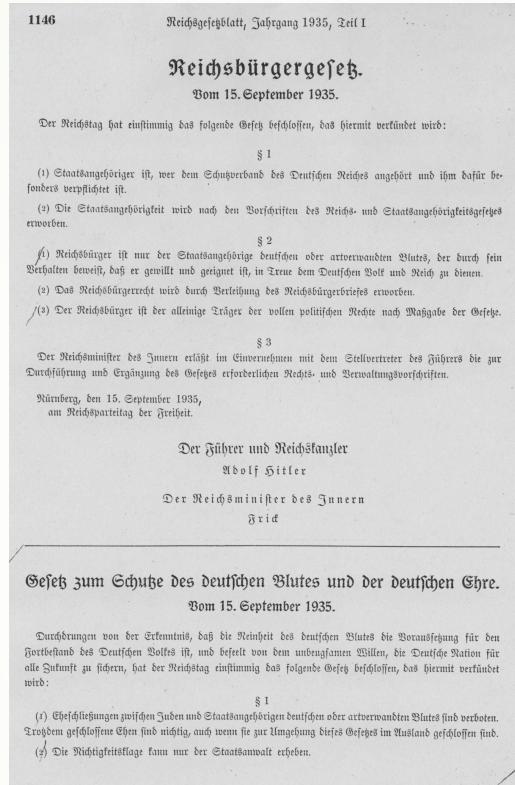
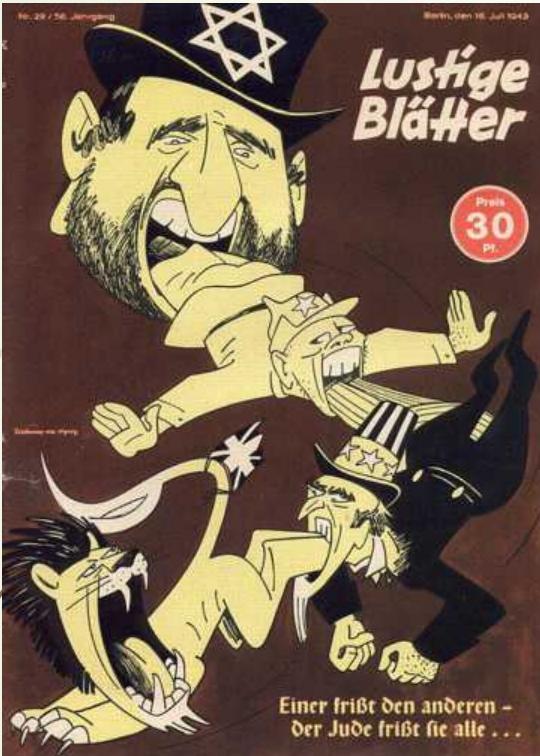
- ▶ A particularly controversial case involves the Femen, a feminist movement founded in Ukraine in 2008 and very critical of Christianity. It is known for attacks against Catholic churches (including Notre Dame in Paris, 2013) and personalities (cardinal Rouco Varela of Spain, 2014, above), and for destroying religious symbols (Kiev, 2012: destruction of the cross in memory of Stalin's victims)

# Legitimate Protests?



- ▶ While many Christians (and others: left) believe that Femen are violating their religious liberty, others defend their protests as legitimate
- ▶ These cases, again, show how delicate is the balance between different rights: freedom of religion, free speech, freedom to demonstrate and protest

# The Rome Model: not only for Christians



- ▶ The Rome model – intolerance → discrimination → hate crimes – applies to many groups
- ▶ Jews in Nazi Germany were first attacked through books and caricatures, then discriminated by the laws: and in the end, Auschwitz came

# Intolerance against Roma and Sinti

- ▶ The Rome model goes even beyond religion. Combating discrimination against Roma and Sinti minorities was a key part of my 2011 OSCE mandate
- ▶ In many countries, they are first subject to intolerance through stereotypes (“they are all thieves”), then targeted by discriminatory laws (special passports, problems in obtaining documents), and very often become victims of hate crimes



# Racism

- ▶ It is important to note that anti-Christian hate cannot be isolated from a more general paradigm of intolerance. Racism, too, starts from stereotypes (left), then discriminates more or less subtly and in the end leads to hate crimes
- ▶ In certain European countries, immigrant Christian religious groups – from Africa, the Philippines, Korea – may be discriminated twice, both as ethnically “foreign” religions and as suspicious “cults”



Intolerance: African American politicians ridiculed in *Harper's Weekly*, March 14, 1874

# United We Stand



- ▶ Inter-religious dialogue counters the common stereotype that religions are at the roots of most problem of hate crimes and violence. While certainly not foreign to violence, religions may in fact also be part of the solution

# “Dialogue of Blood”



- ▶ In some countries, all religions where persecuted by totalitarian regimes (portraits of the martyrs in Albania, left). Persecutions taught religions to coexist through a “dialogue of blood”

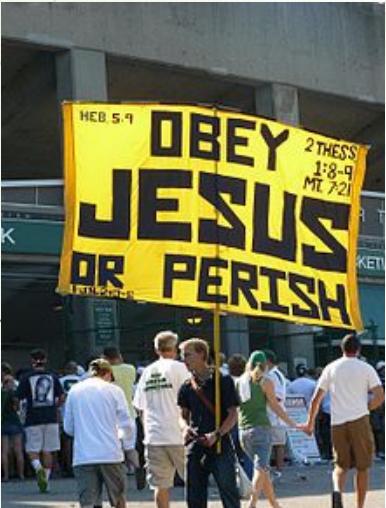
# Different Models



Great Mosque of Rome

- ▶ In order to promote coexistence and prevent hate crimes, do we really need to deny that in certain countries one particular religion is uniquely linked to the nation's history?
- ▶ Not necessarily. In Italy, the Constitution recognizes the unique historical role of the Catholic Church, while offering the possibility of co-operating with the state to other religions, and freedom to all religions that respect the law

# Dialogue in Context



- ▶ Dialogue and the defense of religious liberty should take into account each country's history and traditions. And avoid two extremes: fundamentalism, where one religion discriminates against minorities and non-believers, and militant secularism, where a climate of anti-religious hostility leads to intolerance against all religions

# Faith and Reason

- ▶ Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) wrote in 1998 that faith and reason are like two wings, and both are necessary. If they are reduced to only one wing, no matter what it is, planes cannot fly and crash, in more than one sense
- ▶ The dialogue between faith and reason, different religions, believers and non-believers, remains a key to defending religious liberty





- ▶ For further information, please contact Dr. Massimo Introvigne at [maxintrovigne@gmail.com](mailto:maxintrovigne@gmail.com)

Image: *A Converted British Family Sheltering a Christian Missionary from the Persecution of the Druids*, by William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), one of the first paintings of the British Pre-Raphaelite school