

No Successor for Don Camillo

On the Marginalization of Christians in Europe

By **Gudrun Kugler**, *Director of the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination Against Christians*

Skimming through a newspaper on a day like any other one

While I was waiting at the dentist's office recently I had quite an eye-opener: For once I had no time constraints and I read a newspaper¹ from cover to cover.

On the front page I read of the police raiding the Belgian bishops' conference on the suspicion of their having covered up abuse cases. The bishops' cell phones were confiscated, the archbishop interrogated for ten hours, and two coffins of former bishops were dug out in an effort to find *secret papers* (remember Dan Brown?) – bishops treated like criminals with extreme measures which is reminiscent of long-passed regimes.

Page four mentioned the plans of the Spanish government to remove all religious symbols from public places, including crosses in schools, as well as plans to abolish the Catholic liturgy at state celebrations, where it has always been traditionally present.

On page seven I was told that American lawyers are trying to prevent a county court from summoning the pope to questioning under oath on charges of criminal cover-up.

Page ten portrayed an attempt of the Green party of the parliament of the German state Baden-Württemberg to introduce mandatory education presenting homosexuality as an equal alternative for school age students and to enforce similar training for teachers – without an opt out for concerned (Christian) parents or teachers.

As I read through the culture section, I was surprised that I did not find an

exhibition of art defacing the Bible or displaying Jesus in some indecent position. At least not on that day.

I almost laughed at the irony of what I read in the religion section; the new leader of the Catholic Church in Poland said in his inauguration remarks that he had a feeling that Europe had separated itself from its Christian roots.

That day it was not the dentist who scared me.

Bad weather for Christians

On April 10th 2010 in the morning, Poland's President Lech Kaczynski together with many of Poland's officials died in a plane crash. In the evening I attended a party of young trendy professionals. *"He deserved nothing else..."* I hear being explained, *"he was way too Catholic a president!"* Satisfaction about the terrible death of a nation's president, no sense of pity or compassion – because of his faith.

At another occasion I talk to an adjunct university professor waiting for his promotion. *"There are three applicants, I am objectively the most qualified one. But I was told by a friendly colleague that they are trying to find a reason not to appoint me. They don't want a practicing Catholic in that position."* I have been told many similar stories. Including women preventing the only woman applicant receiving a promotion because of her *religious views*. Naturally, those discriminated against do not want to be quoted or mentioned by name. But I am quite convinced that most of my readers will know someone with a similar story.

Harvard Researcher Edward Green, researcher on HIV/AIDS, wrote on March 27th, 2009, in the *Washington Post* about the professional risks for non-Christians taking Christian standpoints: *"We liberals who work in the fields of global HIV/AIDS and family planning take terrible professional risks if we side with the pope on a divisive topic such as this. The condom has become a symbol of freedom and – along with contraception – female emancipation, so those who question*

condom orthodoxy are accused of being against these causes.” In Green's case, his contract was not renewed, and his project was terminated. His contract was not renewed, and his project was terminated. “On other grounds”, says Administrative Director at Harvard University’s AIDS Prevention Research Project. Right.

Describing the problem

International governmental institutions have on many occasions mentioned the growing threat to religious freedom for Christians. In 2004 the United Nations Economic and Social Council stated “Christianity is also under pressure from a form of secularism, particularly in Europe. In part feelings of suspicion towards Christianity and limitations on its expression stem from the difficulty encountered, in particular in Europe, in managing the increasing presence of Muslims in the region. Thus the tendency to favour similar restrictions on all forms of religion results in the denial of the visible expression of any religion. It also seems that there is a fear of allowing religion to play a role in public life. This is apparently explained by a “rationalist” aversion towards religion, which is seen as representing the irrational, as well as by a tradition of secularism that denies religions the possibility, if not the right, to play a role in public life...”²

On March 4th 2009 the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe hosted a meeting in Vienna on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians, which gathered about 100 experts and state representatives. *“What came out clearly from this meeting is that intolerance and discrimination against Christians is manifested in various forms across the OSCE area,”* said Ambassador Janez Lenarcic, Director of the host organization: the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. In his press release he summarized how the phenomenon was portrayed: *“Meeting participants discussed several aspects of intolerance and discrimination against and among Christians, including violent attacks against persons, property and places of worship, as well as restrictions to the right to freedom of religion or belief. Participants also highlighted inaccurate*

²“Exiting a Dead End Road. A GPS for Christians in Public Discourse”: [more information or purchase.](#)

portrayals of Christian identity and values in the media and political discourse, leading to misunderstandings and prejudice.”

What Christians in Europe face today is a denial of *equal rights* and what we might call *social marginalization*. The term *intolerance* refers to the social dimension, the term *discrimination*, to the legal.

Such intolerant and discriminatory behavior results from: opposition to individual traits of the Christian faith or to moral positions that are intrinsically part of the Christian faith, or from a negative categorical bias against Christians or against Christianity as a whole. It leads to attacks on the social level (such as negative stereotyping and exclusion, or maltreatment in the private realm), on the legal level (for example through a discriminatory law or a biased court verdict) and on the political level (for example through exclusion from the public sphere; a political resolution; etc.).

Black books of intolerance against Christians

Mario Mauro, Italian member of the European Parliament and OSCE representative on freedom of religion recently published a book called *War against Christians* in 2010.

In France Michel de Jaeghere wrote a book entitled *Enquête Sur La Christianophobie* explaining his perception of the phenomenon in detail in 2006.

The topic is on the table in the United Kingdom: The Christian Institute published a report called *Marginalizing Christians*, which catalogues numerous cases of Christians being sidelined by public bodies, popular media, employers and of being faced with barriers to public funding in 2009. The United Kingdom House of Commons held an enquête on discrimination against Christians in the beginning of 2009. House member Mr. Jackson of Peterborough called for a debate on “*systematic and institutional discrimination towards Christians*” asking: “*Does fairness and equality only apply to people who are non-Christians in this*

country?" The BBC aired a one-hour documentary entitled *Are Christians being persecuted?* on Easter Sunday 2010. In September 2010, the Spectator ran the cover story *Don't even think it – Thought Crime Special*.

In January 2009 a poll showed that more than four out of five UK churchgoers (84 per cent) think that religious freedoms, of speech and action, are at risk in the UK. A similar proportion (82 per cent) feels it is becoming more difficult to live as a Christian in an increasingly secular country (Pollwatch January 09 (Cpanel Special), ComRes, January 2009).

No violent persecution – but marginalization

A senior United Nations Official, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance, said in June 2007: *“Christianophobia has always existed, alongside anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. But its current growth is, paradoxically, not being noted in international discussions. Spectacular cases of hostility to Christians are currently occurring outside Europe in India, Nigeria and other countries, but has reached its deepest ideological expression in the West. Here in Europe there is suspicion towards religious practices, as well as a rise in intolerance expressed by the slow marginalization of citizens who confess any faith. The challenge to the whole continent is to find a balance between defending secular principles and upholding religious freedom.”*

Joseph Ratzinger wrote, before he became Benedict XVI: *“Naturally, it is not an anti-Christian persecution, it would be nonsense to call it this. But there are probably some areas of life – and not a few of them – in which it takes courage to admit to being a Christian. Above all, there is a growing danger of conformed forms of Christianity, which are received by society in a friendly manner as more ‘humane’ and which are juxtaposed with the alleged fundamentalism of those who are not willing to be streamlined in such a way. The danger of a dictatorship of opinion is growing and those who do not share the common view are*

cast aside. So, as a result, also good people dare not admit that they oppose. Any future anti-Christian dictatorship would probably be much more subtle than what we previously knew. It will seemingly be religion-friendly, but only until its behavior and thought patterns will not be questioned.”³ We do not use the word persecution when speaking about Europe *on purpose*. Intolerance and discrimination are not a kind of persecution the way it is commonly understood. But if we care about Christianity in Europe, or if we care about a free society and democracy as a whole, the phenomenon needs to be addressed.

An incident at EU Fundamental Rights Agency

In April 2010 I was elected a member of the Advisory Panel of the Fundamental Rights Platform of the Fundamental Rights Agency of the European Union. This advisory body consists of nine elected NGO representatives. “*What do you need an observatory on intolerance against Christians in Europe for?*” I was asked with incredulous looks when we first met.

In a meeting on May 7, 2010 we were told, “*we have a problem with a homophobic NGO in the Advisory Panel.*” Massimo Toschi, the FRA representative in charge, spoke it out directly: “*Ok, let’s say it, it’s about Gudrun.*” Me? I almost fell off my chair. Later, I learn that on the website of the Observatory on Intolerance Against Christians there is a link to a website which had a couple of months before published an article on *reasons against adoption rights for homosexual couples*. Ten members of the European Parliament led by a Dutch radical had written a complaint against my presence in the Advisory Panel. And so the Fundamental Rights Agency – in a meeting with the director, as I am told – considered whether I would have to be removed from the panel. I was lucky; Massimo informed me that the leadership of FRA had concluded not to remove me – as long as I did not use hate speech expressing this (to say the least, *strange*) opinion of mine.

So, I am still a member of the advisory panel. Evidently, the problem in this

case was not *my view* but rather that of a small group of intolerant social engineers. I asked a colleague at the Advisory Panel: Why is there so much fuss about me and that gay adoption issue? He admits: this is “*because you hold Christian positions, and your presence disturbs everyone.*” Now you see, dear colleagues: this is why an observatory on intolerance against Christians in Europe is needed!

Five objections

At the OSCE meeting of March 4th 2009, a member of the secularist society purported that the phenomenon was a merely intra-Christian problem, i.e. Christians of one denomination discriminating against Christians of another. He faced strong opposition, and rightly so. To a large extent, Christian denominations have learned to co-exist. They even work together, and differences are being discussed in mutual respect. And even if there are disputes amongst Christians, what we face all together are radical secularism and political correctness gone overboard, both of which limit fundamental freedoms.

On other occasions I have been told that what Christians encounter today is not intolerance or discrimination, but a process of losing historical privileges: “equality therapy”, so to say.

Historical privileges – far from discriminating against other religious communities – are not necessarily bad, considering that they are, after all, *historical* and that no community exists void of a past with its own historically evolved identity and traditions. Full neutrality is impossible since even an empty white wall is a statement, especially if it is a consequence of the removal of the crucifix. One religious community holding privileges for historical reasons does not mean that others are being discriminated against – as long as their enshrined rights are protected.

The withdrawal of privileges from Christianity constitutes an unnatural break with history and identity, and it is an expression of hostility. This hostility does

not stop at the removal of privileges. It causes marginalization and social exclusion, and it leads to the denial of rights of Christians. *Equal* rights for Christians are at stake.

Others have argued that Christianity could not be discriminated against in Europe because Christians still constitute a majority. Some people conclude from the premise that minorities deserve protection that it is not possible to discriminate against a majority. Wrong! South African blacks were not a minority when they suffered from apartheid. Rocco Buttiglione was not accepted as an EU commissioner due to his adherence to Christianity, the majority faith. Imagine one person at a microphone insulting a silent crowd. Imagine a small group of CEOs not hiring members of a majority religion because they do not like that religion. This *is* possible! It is true that intolerance and discrimination *more often* affect minorities. But this is not necessary to the definition of the terms. More essential than numbers is power: who sets the tone, who is listened to, and who creates the agenda. Every day Europe's majority faith is being treated disrespectfully; its faithful are receiving strange looks; and its free exercise faces unjust limitations. And yet another thought: As Christianity in Europe goes through a transition today, one might speak of a majority only with regard to baptism certificates. But those are not the people who experience intolerance and discrimination.

Again, on other grounds, I have been told not to be so sensitive about these "minor issues" in Europe when Christians in other regions are confronted with blatant persecution even to the point of martyrdom. Reports suggest that 100 million Christians worldwide are being persecuted and that 75% of all religious persecution is directed against Christians. Certainly the plight of Christians in these regions is dreadful and I support every effort to relieve their suffering. But it was John Paul II who asked back in 1983 not to overlook "besides common forms of persecution ... more sophisticated punishments, such as social discrimination or subtle restrictions of freedom, possibly leading to a

kind of civil death.”

Assuredly, for Christians to “turn the other cheek” is an expression of personal spirituality. Yet with regard to public policy the Christian motto is to take action to *help one’s neighbor*, not to turn the cheek – or the head – when *another* is being unjustly treated or persecuted. A Christian must not look away from an injustice done to another Christian so that he may gain practice in turning the other cheek. A Christian will always work towards a more free and just society – including for Christians.

Thought Crime Special. Examples of discrimination against Christians

Freedom of expression is essential for democracy. It is the *sine qua non* for any debate. Hate speech legislation is a legal climax of political correctness and stands in direct competition to freedom of expression. In several European countries, a word of disapproval or criticism against a group protected by law contains the risk of a fine or even a prison sentence.

We have seen plenty of Christians in legal trouble for Judeo-Christian morality and for discussing issues related to Islam. The most prominent example is that of Ake Green, a pastor belonging to the Pentecostal movement, who was charged with committing a *hate crime* for preaching a sermon on homosexuality in Borghold, Sweden, and who was sentenced to one month in prison. He was acquitted after much international attention – but the law is still in force.

Christian Vanneste, a French member of parliament, was condemned on the 24th of January 2006 by the tribunal of Lille for *incitement to hatred in reason of the sexual orientation of the persons aimed at*. He was sanctioned to pay more than 10 000 Euro fine and damages for having said publicly, “*Homosexuality is a menace for the survival of humanity.*”

In the United Kingdom in 2010, we learned about several evangelical street

preachers, such as Dale McAlpine and Shawn Holes, who were arrested and held for a couple of hours in a prison cell after having answered to a direct question that homosexuality is a sin.

This is the gradual introduction of the penalization of speech – in other words: thought control and dictatorship of opinion.

Voltaire is quoted for this beautiful sentence: *“I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.”* Should speech be restricted? Yes, when public incitement instigates violence. No, when an opinion offends, when it insults, when it expresses disrespect. Do not get me wrong. I am not in favor of offending, insulting and disrespecting people. I think everyone should be a gentleman. But I am worried when penal law punishes those who don't want to be.

We must also look at equality – or anti-discrimination legislation, which goes way beyond *equality before the law* irrespective of religion, race, gender, etc. This legislation seeks to codify and regulate political correctness *in the actions of individual citizens*; for example, which clients an entrepreneur serves, to whom a room in a bed & breakfast is given, which staff a religious community hires; or maybe even which membership criteria an association may apply.

Catholic adoption agencies in the United Kingdom are some of the most prominent victims of equality and anti-discrimination legislation. In 2007, anti-discrimination legislation made it illegal for adoption agencies to turn down same-sex couples as possible adoptive and foster parents, without the possibility of opt-out for Catholic adoption agencies. After 120 years of outstanding work, they were forced to cut their religious affiliation – or close down.

Along the same lines we find rights of parents violated when it comes to sex education in schools.

In short, anti-discrimination creates a kind of *side-effect discrimination* or *collateral damage*, namely Christians, who may not live or act according to their faith.

Conscientious objection is also being objected to, as in this recent example:

Ms. McCafferty of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe was the drafter of a resolution on *Women's access to lawful medical care [and] the problem of unregulated use of conscientious objection*. She was strongly supported by the European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics. This draft resolution aimed at forcing health care institutions to provide every medical treatment *lawful* in a given country: for example abortion, euthanasia, in-vitro-fertilization and pre-implantation diagnostics. This would have forced Christian hospitals to close down! Ms. McCafferty proposed to create a public registry of individual objectors – a blacklist! – and to require him or her to “provide information to patients about all treatment options available (regardless of whether such information may induce the patient to pursue treatment to which the health care provider objects)”; to “refer patients to another health care provider in that case” and to “ensure that patients receive appropriate treatment from the health care provider to whom they have been referred”. In case of abortion or assisted suicide, a faithful Christian could have met none of these requirements. Luckily – but by a very small margin only – this discriminatory report was voted down on October 7th, 2010.

No Successor for Don Camillo. Examples of intolerance against and marginalization of Christians

I was recently quite surprised by a German friend starting a new business selling Christmas cards. *Christmas cards?* “Yes – they are hard to find, those with religious motifs!” It is true that in England, only 5% of all Christmas cards would be qualified as such. I do not need to cite the countless examples of removed crosses from the public square, removed inscriptions and plaques, prohibited Christians symbols worn by students, nurses or flight attendants. The reader will have heard about those cases himself.

Michel De Jaeghere observes in his *Enquête sur la Christianophobie*⁴ how Christianity has slowly faded out of arts and media. In film and fiction, he

writes, the people portrayed never go to Church. There are all kinds of characters representing minorities – the immigrant, the homosexual, and the black person – but there is never a clever, faithful Christian! *Don Camillo n'a pas eu de successeur*. To stay with De Jaeghere, Christianity has practically disappeared from novels and contemporary theater. Just one strange place is left for it: commercials. But it is never the Catholic intellectual, the devout pastor, or the Christian artist who is presented – no, it is the *well-living monk brewing beer or producing cheese*.

Christianity on TV today is not a fact or a characteristic – it is a target. Prejudices are reinforced; negative stereotyping is state of the art.

Speaking of art: Hurt feelings in exhibitions of modern art are nothing rare. To hit at what is sacred to Christians is not considered inappropriate.

Walter Brandmüller⁵ analyses how the great persecutions of Christians in European history all had begun: The persecution in post-revolution France was set in place by numerous subtle anti-Christian academic presentations in the encyclopedic best-sellers inspired by Voltaire written between 1751 and 1780. The German Kulturkampf from 1871 to 1878 was preceded by *literary-publicist aggression* carried out by Feuerbach, Büchner, Vogt and Moleschott, which then culminated in a resolution of the German conference of journalists on July 31st of 1869: *"It is the duty of honor of every thinking person to use all legal means to close monasteries, depatronize Jesuits and leave the concordat..."* Just a few days later, the first monastery was attacked and desolated; 1800 priests imprisoned or banished thereafter.

In 1937 the German national socialists distributed a leaflet at the occasion of the traditional Corpus Christi procession where states: *"Whoever participates in the procession is against the Reich and consciously with the abusers of children, who defile innocent German boys and girls in the confessional, in the sacristy ... and next to the altar. Germans, if there is any feeling in you, turn away with disgust..."* and elsewhere: *"What has the son of a German mother to do with the pope and clerics?"* I do not need to recount to the reader the severity and extent

of persecution under the Nazi regime.

In December 2009, students disrupted a lecture of protestant philosopher Prof. Edith Düsing at Cologne University by making noise, kissing and showing banners. The reason: Düsing had supported a manifesto in May 2009 that protested the cancellation of an academic lecture at a psychology congress on grounds of the speakers' research on the possibilities of change for those with unwanted same-sex attractions.

In January 2008 the Pope's visit to University La Sapienzia was cancelled due to protests on grounds of the allegation that the Pope was not supportive of scientific discovery. That many more students met with the Pope afterwards to show their support is beautiful – but it does not do away with the intolerance that preceded it.

The current campaigns against religious symbols (including Christmas symbols) are no secret. They culminate in court rulings to remove the crucifix from public places - the most prominent of which was a case called *Lautsi* in 2009 in the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

What one is often less aware of is the high number of church and graveyard desecrations taking place, especially in France and Germany. A church building or a cemetery is being vandalized every other day in France, reports *Le Figaro* on September 22, 2010. Such crimes are often attributed to mischievous spirits of youths. We better hope that that is right.

Exiting a Dead End Road: endlessly energetic laymen

There is something in the air, some common hatred against Christianity, clothed in wise words and polite smiles, difficult to detect, something raging and invisible which those who observe notice but cannot yet name. What is it? Some kind of allergy? Does the mere presence of Christianity make people uncomfortable? Is it a constant *reminder* of something one does not want to hear of? What makes expressions of Christianity so unbearable that they must be

hunted down, as a last resort by the force of law?

And why is it that the *largest grass-roots organization in Europe* – if the reader is so generous as to grant me using this term for Christianity – is so little heard in the public? Which association has an office and full time staff in *every one-horse town* and yet receives little else but criticism?

But this book is about solutions. Alasdair MacIntyre said that Saint Benedict did not want to save Europe but live Christianity in a radical form together with his friends: and in doing so, he inadvertently saved Europe. John Courtney Murray wrote, *“The Holy Spirit does not descend into the City of Man in the form of a dove. He comes only in the endlessly energetic spirit of justice and love that dwells in the man of the City, the layman.”*

What are these *“energetic laymen”* now to do?

The first step is to be even better Christians. Remember Mother Theresa saying, *“The only things that have to change are you and I.”* On a personal level this means to be faithful in the many little things that come our way every day, to yearn for spreading the gospel, yes, to *go and tell it on the mountains*.

Christians often speak on societal issues in public without mentioning the faith, in order to offer an argument to *everyone interested*, not just to believers. This is very considerate... however: in doing so, are we not withholding the *real thing* which ordinary people in front of their TV sets would need to hear? Don't get me wrong: I am wholly intrigued by the Christian natural law tradition and ability of explaining almost everything by reason alone. And I fervently disagree with the Austrian pastor who expressed his similar dismay by saying: *“I can't believe you are using right reason in public debate instead of the bible!”* But maybe Christians should talk more about their faith *to the viewers* and *into their searching hearts* than trying to make the interviewing journalist *agree*. Just a thought.

In my village of origin a large cross is attached to the outside of the local parish church. On it are inscribed all of the years in which a major outreach of

evangelization has been organized there, beginning in 1865. The list ends in 1961, with one outlier in 1987.

The second step is to be aware of the fact that intolerance and discrimination against Christians is a problem. This is why we run an Observatory that monitors the situation and collects reliable data, as well as interesting quotations and documents. Our research is then offered to all interested people, to politicians, to the media, human rights organizations, governments and international governmental institutions.

The third step for Christians is to be more fully committed to their faith. A German research institute recently concluded that the most noticeable thing about Christians is that they are *unnoticeable*.⁶ It is the responsibility of every single Christian to change that.

Christians need to shape the public debate. There is a lot to give! No important issue should go uncommented. The main call for Christians is to be *more authentic* and *less afraid*, to be well informed and to speak up with intelligible and reasonable arguments. For a Christian to engage in the public debate is an *act of charity!*

Politicians inspired by Christianity should not leave their faith like a hat in the wardrobe in front of the halls of power. They have reason to be *less timid*. They should be very keen to work for the protection of human dignity and against legal restrictions that either directly or indirectly effect Christians, in the awareness that in the context of broad reaching legislation that limits fundamental freedoms, spotty and provisional exemptions for Christians do not suffice for the preservation of and shaping of a free and just society.

Those who work in the fields of media and arts must try to work towards a more positive portrayal of Christians and to combat the prejudices created by negative stereotyping.

Those who work academically and on the intellectual level should try to bring Christian principles out of their current lonely ghetto and into the mainstream debate.

Christian parents must make the passing on of the faith to their children a priority. This includes a careful and considerate choice of schools. Those who work in the field of education need to revisit their profound responsibility and renew their commitment to their faith.

Church leaders should allow themselves to clearly articulate the Christian point of view and to address the foundational concepts and frameworks needed for all people to seek happiness.

The time of watching the developments of society from your living room sofa is over.

So, is this the grand master plan? Probably not. But as Christians we know this: We are only responsible for that which we are able to do. Yes, our goal is to do our part in shaping the world so that it becomes a place in which all can flourish. But if we are not able to make changes on the large scale, our second goal is to be of assistance to those individuals, be they only a few, who are listening and who are beginning to reconsider and ponder what Christianity tells them. Yet even if it does not happen, and even if no one listens, it still will have been worthwhile to have voiced the truth, to have spoken up for the weakest, and to have proclaimed the Christian faith.

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- 1 German-language newspaper Die Tagespost, June 29th, 2010.
 - 2 UN-Economic and Social Council, Report submitted by Mr. Doudou Diène, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, December 13, 2004
 - 3 Joseph Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, Stuttgart 1996, p. 164.
 - 4 *Enquête sur la Christianophobie*, Michel De Jaeghere, Renaissance Catholique, 2006.
 - 5 Nicht Idealzustand, aber Normalfall. Wie entstehen Christenverfolgungen, Die Tagespost, 6. Juli 2010.
 - 6 Renate Köcher, Allensbacher Institut für Demoskopie: "Das Auffällige an den Christen ist ihre Unauffälligkeit."