

How much religious freedom should be granted to people of other faiths? What about harassment of Christian refugees?

There are things almost all of us used to take for granted before the refugee crisis became a major topic of attention for the media and for politicians. Various political figures and parties in Europe have now overtly challenged the [Geneva Convention on Refugees](#), signed in 1951 (after the horrors of World War II), whereby more than 145 countries have committed to protect people who are persecuted, including on religious grounds, and lost their home country's protection. Some claim we should simply stop welcoming people who seek protection. Some claim that only people persecuted because they were Christians deserve protection in 'Christian' European countries (see FAQ 7). The crisis is challenging our political values and principles of freedom, human dignity, equality, the rule of law as well as respect for human rights, including for minorities.

The settled opinion of the Christian religious freedom community—certainly so in Evangelical circles—is that *religious freedom is for all*. Freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief (aka 'FoRB'), just like any universally recognised human right (including the right to be protected from persecution), should be respected for everyone everywhere. These rights and freedoms are tied to our recognition that, although imperfect, all human beings are created in the likeness of God and possess inalienable dignity. As much as God is seeking and saving those who are lost, God calls people to seek him and find him; forced worship stinks to the nostrils of God.

Political and religious freedoms are among the reasons that attract exiles *to Europe* as opposed to other places. Europe's understanding of religious freedom and human rights cannot differ from the universal principles. Freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief is in principle maximal and should be recognised equally for all human beings. The *manifestations* of religion or belief (including expressing one's worldview-based opinions and behaving according to them) can be regulated at a national or local level depending on the context, but outlawing certain expressions of faith or belief should only happen in very limited circumstances where genuine harm exists, such as threats, calls to violence, or proven danger for the rights and security of other people. Expression of faith or belief should not be banned simply because it is perceived as 'extreme,' 'radical,' 'fundamentalist' or 'foreign,' whatever the religion or belief. My belief and behaviour can always be perceived as extreme by someone else.

Diversity, however, is a challenge and needs proper governance. Europe's history, whether ancient or more recent, is a blatant reminder of that. Surely, it could be argued that mismanagement of diversity in local or national politics, in Europe and elsewhere, has led to very intricate public policy challenges today. The integration – or, better, *inclusion* – of recent migrants and their children is one of the more pressing challenges. In this effort, it is important for Christians to value a culture of hospitality, which means recognising the culture and dignity of the other, while at the same time demanding of everyone to abide by common rules.

However, much of that discussion is beyond the realm of law: alongside others in our societies, Christians, individually or in community, need to *foster virtues of civility* which will help newcomers and established residents live together in harmony, including with their differences. Rejecting what is sometimes the most precious part of people's identity – their faith or core sources of meaning, irrespective of whether that source is true or untrue – is often the best way to foster hostility and hatred.

Just as all the refugees should have their religious freedom protected, they also need help to understand that religious freedom is for all and that, in Europe, they must accept this fact. This could be a challenging truth for some Muslims. Indeed, there have been troubling stories of harassment of non-Muslims in refugee camps. And many Muslims will find it hard to tolerate those who choose to explore the possibility of leaving Islam.

Christians should ask the authorities to ensure that religious freedom, including the right to change your faith is both maintained within the refugee communities but that it is also taught in a positive way to adults and also in schools. Where necessary, protection must be provided for those in danger of persecution because of their faith, be that Christian, Yazidi, different kinds of Muslim or another faith.

Christians can help by providing opportunities for people of different faiths to come together in joint activities (sport, culture, meals etc.), by encouraging mutual understanding and in being sensitive in all their conversations about their own faith. If Christian refugees of Muslim background join their church, they should understand the pressures they may well be under and also bear in mind basic security issues, e.g. not taking photos.