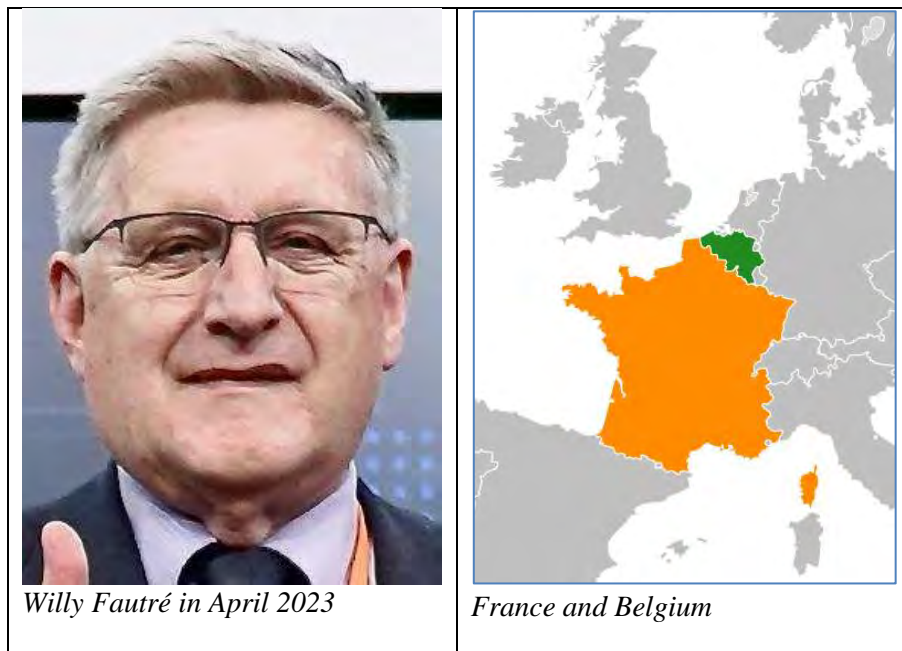


FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: Religious Intolerance In Europe

Knut Holdhus
August 26, 2023



Human rights expert mentions especially France and Belgium for their religious intolerance.



In an [article 21st August 2023](#) published by Brussels-based [Human Rights Without Frontiers](#) (HRWF) on its website, Willy Fautré, director and journalist, warns against religious intolerance, what he calls "a culture of intolerance, suspicion and stigmatization" towards new religious movements in Europe.

In April this year he took part in a fact finding tour of Taiwan and found the island nation might have a lesson or two for Europe when it comes to religious tolerance and inclusion. According to Fautré, there is no societal or state intolerance towards religions in Taiwan, including new religious movements. He asks why several European nations with a majority Christian religion have developed such an intolerance.

Fautré mentions especially France and Belgium,

"Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons or Scientologists, just to name a few, are 'unloved' religious movements in Europe where they are the targets of derogatory statements, defamatory campaigns, distorted news and false information.

In the late 1990s, France and Belgium had respectively investigated 172 and 187 religious or belief

movements suspected of being dangerous or harmful cults. Both countries still have a very active state cult observatory allegedly monitoring their activities and publishing controversial reports that have been successfully challenged in courts."

According to the Belgian human rights activist, central agents for generating religious intolerance in Europe are so-called apostates, persons who have renounced their belief and publicly reject it. Some of them, often fueled by the anti-cult movement, became militant opponents of their former faith. Most ex-members of a religion simply leave and get on with their new life. Fautré points out that apostates "have left them [faiths] in the midst of a conflict and [...] are driven by a spirit of revenge. Groups of apostates have thus formed out of common hostility to various movements [...] such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Hare Krishna, Mormons, the [Unification Church](#), Scientology and others."

One obvious reason for the religious intolerance is the fact that most of the media world looks for sensationalist stories and often unquestioningly prints the claims of apostates. Willy Fautré describes this,

"They found allies in the media, who were looking for 'juicy' stories, and they quite often fed them with unfounded accusations, distorted information and fabricated cases, creating hereby a climate of social anxiety and hostility. The word 'cult', systematically attributed to new religious or belief movements, became a signal of distrust, threat and danger. Many European governments surfed on this media wave of stigmatization, demonization and hostility. Intolerance and discrimination followed and continue to this day, in particular through their so-called 'cult observatories' in some countries."

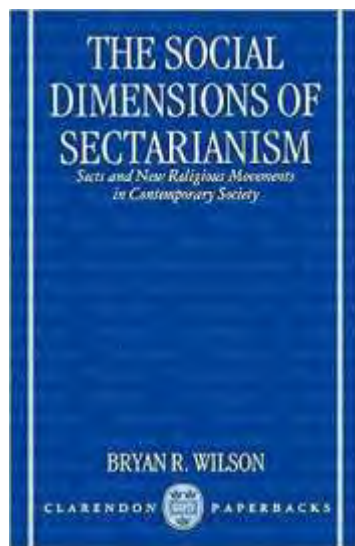


The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) denounced the religious intolerance in European countries in a report published 24th July 2023, titled "[Religious Freedom Concerns about Religious Freedom in the European Union](#)". The report clearly criticizes certain EU nations,

"Several governments in the EU have supported or facilitated the propagation of harmful information about certain religious groups."

See [Discrimination of Religious Minorities in EU](#)

Bryan Ronald Wilson (1926-2004), Reader Emeritus of Sociology of the University of Oxford, England, says,



"The apostate is generally in need of self-justification. He seeks to reconstruct his own past, to excuse his former affiliations, and to blame those who were formerly his closest associates. Not uncommonly the apostate learns to rehearse an 'atrocious story' to explain how, by manipulation, trickery, coercion, or deceit, he was induced to join or to remain within an organization that he now forswears and condemns. Apostates, sensationalized by the press, have sometimes sought to make a profit from accounts of their experiences in stories sold to newspapers or produced as books (sometimes written by 'ghost' writers)." (Bryan Wilson, *The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, p. 19.)

Professor emeritus in sociology of religion Stephen A. Kent, known for his anti-cult views and quoting apostates extensively, admitted in 2017,



Stephen A. Kent

"For decades, academics have discussed apostates, but in the late 1970s a number of prominent sociological researchers began defining them as unreliable information sources who intended their often-embellished atrocity tales or stories to motivate agents of social control to act against their former groups.

A few dissenting voices to this interpretation appeared as early as the mid-1980s, but the wholesale rejection of apostates' information became the dominant academic position among important sociologists of religion.

By the early 1990s, the grand figure of sectarian studies, Bryan R. Wilson, called for objective researchers and the courts to avoid apostates entirely because their atrocity accounts supposedly were self-serving and embellished. (*The History of Credibility Attacks*

Against Former Cult Members, article by Stephen A. Kent and Kayla Swanson, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada in International Journal of Cultic Studies, vol. 8, no. 2, 2017, page 1)

One of the policies of the anti-cult movement is to brand as 'cult apologist' any researcher or scientist writing objectively about new religious movements. In her obituary for Bryan Wilson (1926-2004), Eileen Barker, professor in sociology of religion, specializing in minority religions, wrote,



Dr. Eileen Barker, OBE, in 1997

"Like several other sociologists of religion whose work brought them into close contact with the new religions, Wilson found himself being branded a 'cult apologist'. Generally, he ignored such accusations, although he did on occasion pick up the gauntlet, as, for example, when Irving Horowitz accused him and others who attended conferences sponsored by new religions of jeopardising the scientific status of their scholarship.

Wilson's response included pointing out that 'empathy need not lead to advocacy', and that the conferences were not so much sponsored research as consultations. His conditions for attending such a conference included the strictures that he should be free to say whatever he chose; that his participation should not be used for propaganda purposes; and that he should have personal control over the publication of his own contribution."

(www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/1647/161p381.pdf)

"Religious Intolerance in Europe" - text: Knut Holdhus

Featured image above: Jehovah's Witnesses outside the British Museum 30th May 2017. Photo: Philafrenzy / Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC BY-SA 4.0 Int.](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) Cropped

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	Tibet	Ahmadiys	Anglicans	Baha'is	Buddhists	Catholics	Church of Almighty God/Believers (AIG)	Falun Gong	Jehovah's Witnesses	Hindus	Humanists	Jehovah's Witnesses	Muslims/ Ruzbihan	Muslims/ Said Kharij followers	Phalans/ Shias	Muslims/ Sufis	Muslims/ Sunnis	Muslims/ Pakigh Jamaat	Orthodox (Coptic)	Protestants	Statements
China	2665				20	3	463	2102			6				17	23				31	
Algeria	1																			1	
Egypt	9																			9	
Eritrea	30										20								3	7	
Indonesia	1																0			1	
Iran	66	1	39											1	7					18	
Kazakhstan	11																11				
Kyrgyzstan	1																1				
Nigeria	2								1						1						
North Korea	95																			81	14
Pakistan	60	16				2		1						1		16				24	
Russia Crimea	12										10					2					
Russia	135										112	5	10					8			
Saudi Arabia	1														1						
Singapore	11										11										
South Korea	1										1										
Tajikistan	11										1						9	1			
Turkmenistan	25												5				20				
Uzbekistan	73												2			71					
Vietnam	30				24	2														4	
TOTAL	3240	16	1	39	44	7	463	2102	1	1	161	5	17	3	25	153	9	12	167	5	

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Human Rights Without Frontiers tracks incidents worldwide where people are imprisoned for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief.

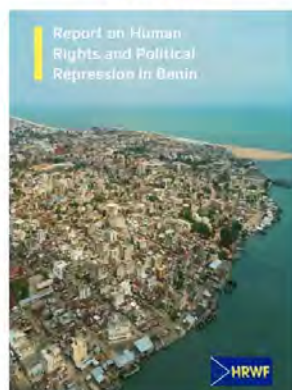
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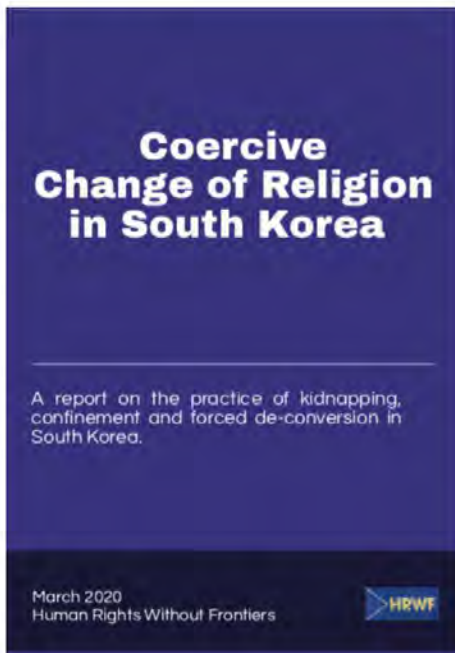


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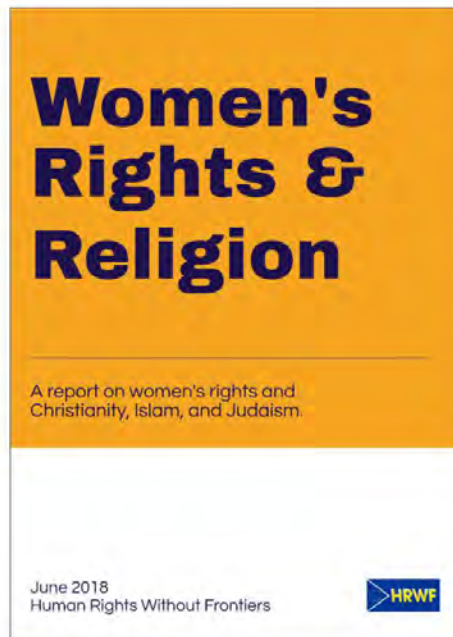
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