

“Mission and Religious Freedom”

Fjellhaug Symposium, 20–21 September 2023

Call for Papers

There are multiple interrelations between Christian mission and religious freedom, both from a theological perspective, as well as from a human rights perspective.

Organized Christian mission in its contemporary expressions is dependent in some way on freedom of religion or belief. Restrictions of this freedom, its violation, e.g. in the form of discrimination and persecution, might force a high price on the participation in the *missio Dei* both for the agents as well as for the recipients of this mission. Denial of access to countries or specific peoples to foreign Christian workers, prohibition and sanctions of inviting others to leave the majority religion or official world view, the outlawing of the Christian faith altogether or any of its particular expressions, prohibition of the importation, dissemination, acquisition or possession of the Bible or Christian media or its censure, the banning of manifestations of the Christian faith from the general public, – these are but some examples of obstacles in the way of Christian mission. Often those who respond in some positive way to Christian mission, risk all sorts of state or social sanctions and at times even their lives. These realities for missionaries and converts should be of no surprise, as Jesus clearly warned about the cost of discipleship when training and sending his disciples and the New Testament records are full of examples of this reality. This mirrors the fate of Old Testament prophets.

Furthermore, Christian mission as a servant of the *missio Dei* needs to respect the religious freedom of those whom it invites to follow Christ if it is to be true to its Master. Christian mission betrays its character if it were to violate religious freedom. This calls for a self-critical examination of attitudes, positions of power, and methods by the agents of mission, both in past and present. The ethical criteria would be similar as for the transmission of religion, which take place within the framework of the community of descent. In the course of the history of the church, at times some hybrid expressions of Christian mission have been conflated with the spread of political rule using all sorts of coercive means.

In addition, culturally insensitive or unwise forms of mission might provoke unnecessary social hostilities or state sanctions and ensuing violations of religious freedom.

Finally, religious freedom requires religious mission in order to come into being and is permanently dependent on it. Religious mission contributes to the establishment of religious freedom by providing a faith alternative beyond that handed down from the community of ancestry or imposed by political hegemony. Without such an alternative, there would be no freedom, as there is no choice if there is but one option.

Thus, the interrelation between Christian mission and religious freedom can be studied from the perspective of any theological discipline and other fields of research.

Possible proposals for papers could focus on, but are not limited to, the following fields or topics:

- Ground rules for responsible mission
- Diaconia-aid and mission
- Ethics of/ in mission
- Biblical foundations, norms or case studies

- Christian mission in the light of Christian rationales for religious freedom
- Historical case studies of violations of religious freedom in Christian mission
- Examination of advocacy for religious freedom for the sake of Christian mission
- The costs of mission in the face of adversity
- Sensitive mission in contexts of limited religious freedom
- Considering and integrating the cost of discipleship in Christian mission
- Risk evaluation by those responsible for sending agents of mission into contexts of limited religious freedom
- Mission, teaching, and manifestation of faith as foundational religious freedom rights contrary to common misrepresentations of Christian mission

Please send your abstract (200-300 words) before 1 June 2023 to forskning@fjellhaug.no You will be notified of acceptance before 1 July 2023.

Practical Information presenters

Each researcher is given 15-20 minutes to present his/her paper.

The presentation will be followed by responses and comments in plenum. Depending on number of participants and papers each paper is given between 30 and 45 minutes. If there are many papers some of the paper sessions will be divided in groups.

An abstract of the paper will be made available for the symposium participants.

The presentation and the responses will be in English

Big screen and sound system are available. Presenters can use their own PC.

The presenters are free to publish their papers where they find it expedient.

The symposium will primarily be for researchers; academically interested practitioners are also invited.

Questions, please contact forskning@fjellhaug.no

General information about the symposium, such as plenary speakers, program and logistical arrangements can be found here in due course: <https://fih.fjellhaug.no/forskning>