

RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN WESTERN ASIA

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Overview

Throughout history, the religious landscape in Western Asia has been extremely diversified. In the first centuries of the Common Era, remnants of forms of Hellenism coexisted with Zoroastrianism, Manicheism, Judaism and Christianity. Christianity itself was much divided, not only along doctrinal lines, but also according to language and ethnicity. The political powers, both of the East-Roman Empire or the Persian Arsacides or Sassanids had to cope with this situation and to think of solutions which would serve their political interests. These solutions could vary from straightforward persecution to attempts at regulating the position of minority groups within a majority setting.

The situation changed dramatically in the 7th century, with the beginning of Islam. The old political boundaries became obsolete and the new rulers were confronted with the existence of a variety of religious convictions, some of these more organized than other ones. From a juridical and political point of view, it became necessary to regulate the juridical position of these religious groups within the newly formed Islamic State. On a more religious level, the different communities, especially the so-called Nestorians and Jacobites, tried to explain their faith to the 'newcomers', who responded to this challenge in different and creative ways. It was a period of fruitful interaction, during which all parties involved could not escape absorbing influences from the other, both religiously and culturally.

This challenging interaction came to an end in the crusader period and when in subsequent centuries Western Asia came under the political influence of western powers, be it by the intermediary of western missionaries, political penetration (the so-called capitulations), or the establishment of colonial structures. New forms of interaction however were made possible by the emergence of forms of Arab nationalism in the 19th century, where Muslims and Christians could find each other on the basis of a "secular" concept, thus preparing their political cooperation during the formation of national states in the 20th century.

What lessons can be learned from history when we witness to-day the growing influence of fundamentalist groups in different modern states of Western Asia, which advocate a one religion solution for Western Asia and exclude the possibility of different beliefs co-existing within the boundaries of a same territory?

The main objectives of the course are as follows:

- To understand and discern the complexities of the religious situation in Western Asia in the pre-Islamic period.
- To comprehend the Islamic attitude towards religious minorities both from juridical and intellectual perspectives as well as the responses given by the non-Islamic communities, especially the Nestorians and Jacobites.
- To perceive the climate of dialogue and openness in the first Abbasid Period, and to interpret the examples that will be discussed during the lectures.
- To gain insight into the process of estrangement between “second-Abbasid-period” + “post-Abbasid period” Islam and Christianity.
- To perceive the process of rapprochement as a result of the emergence of forms of Arab nationalism.
- To recognize – and to reflect on – the present-day situation of minorities in Western Asia with the help of the models of coexistence-dialogue-estrangement taught in the historical survey.

Lecture wise course plan (15 hrs)

Day 1

January 30, 2017 (Monday)

Lecture 1 Introduction. Why this course? The importance of West Asian Christianity vs. European based Christianity for interreligious dialogue
(10.00-11.00 am)

Tea/Coffee Break (11.00-11.30 am)

Lecture 2 Religious minorities vs. majority in the East-Roman territories of Western Asia in the pre-Islamic Period
(11.30 am-12.30 pm):

Questions-Remarks: Discussion
(12.30-1.00 pm)

Day 2

January 31, 2017 (Tuesday)

Lecture 3 Religious minorities vs. majority in the Persian Empire in the pre-Islamic Period
(10.00-11.00 am):

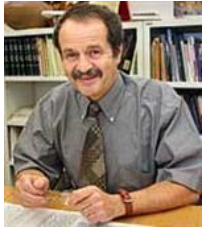
Tea/Coffee Break (11-11.30 am)

Lecture 4 Early Islamic conquest. Development of the *dhimma*-system, a historical approach
(11.30 am-12.30 pm):

Questions-Remarks: Discussion
(12.30-1.00 pm)

Modules	<p>A: Duration: January 30-February 4, 2017 (15 hours)</p> <p>B: Venue Centre of Comparative Religions and Civilizations, Jamia Millia Islamia (A Central University), New Delhi – 110 025, India</p> <p><i>Number of participants for the course will be limited to fifty.</i></p>
You Should Attend If...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ You are Faculty or students from Academic/Research Institutions, keen in understanding and discerning the complexities of the religious situation in Western Asia, and the vital role of interreligious dialogue today. ▪ Members of NPO/NGO, or journalists, interested in having new insights on some of the present-day problems of religious minorities, and the potentialities of solution in the light of the historical developments.
Fees	<p>The participation fees for taking the course is as follows:</p> <p>Participants from abroad: US \$200</p> <p>Industry/ Research Organizations: Rs. 5000/-</p> <p>Academic Institutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty members: Rs. 1000/- • Students: Rs. 500/- <p><i>The above fee includes all reading materials, stationary kit, refreshments, certificates and library facility. The participants will be provided accommodation on payment basis, subject to the availability.</i></p>

The Faculty



Prof. Dr. Herman G.B. TEULE, studied Semitic Studies, Oriental Studies, Philosophy, Theology, and Religious Studies at the University of Amsterdam, and the KU Leuven. He is the former Head of the Institute of Eastern Christian Studies at Radboud University, Nijmegen (Netherlands), Emeritus Full Professor of 'Christian Minorities in the Middle East', Chair Eastern Christianity of the same University, and Emeritus Extraordinary Professor at the Faculty of Religious Studies, KU Leuven. He was Visiting Professor at the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, India; St Tychon's Theological Faculty, Moscow. In 2015, he co-founded The Leuven Centre for the Study of Eastern and Oriental Christianity (LOCEOC) at KU Leuven, Belgium.

His main fields of research are: the interaction between the religious and cultural world of West Asian Christianity and Islam; the interaction of Eastern Christians and the West; the present-day developments, especially the situation of minorities in Turkey, Syria and Iraq.

Prof. Teule is a multilingual author, editor and co-editor of numerous publications, very particularly in the field of Christian-Muslim relations. His work includes: *Les Assyro-chaldéens. Chrétiens d'Iran, de Turquie et d'Irak. Fils d'Abraham*, 30 (Turnhout, Brepols, 2008); *The Ethicon of Barhebraeus. Critical edition, translation and commentary*, 2 vols., CSCO, (Rome, 1993). Co-author and editor of *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History. Volumes I-IV* (Leiden, Brill, vol. I: 2009; vol. 2: 2010; vol. 3: 2011, and vol. 4: 2012); *Eastern Christians and Their Written Heritage* (Leuven, Peeters, 2012); *Eastern Christians and Their Written Heritage. Manuscripts, Scribes and Context* (Leuven, Peeters, 2011); *The Syriac Renaissance* (Leuven, Peeters, 2010). Selected articles in academic books include: Lemma 'Chaldeans' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*³ (2015); 'Christians in Iraq. An Analysis of some recent Developments' in S. Griffith e.a. (eds), *Christsein in der islamischen Welt. Festschrift für M. Tamcke* (Wiesbaden, 2015, pp. 587-594); 'The

Course Co-ordinator

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<http://www.gian.iitkgp.ac.in/GREGN>

Theme of Language in Christian-Muslim Discussions in the Abbasid Period: some Christian views' in D. Pratt (eds.), *The Character of Christian-Muslim Encounter. Essays in honour of D. Thomas* (Leiden, 2015, pp. 85-94); 'Christianity in Western Asia' in F. Wilfred (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia* (Oxford, 2014, pp. 17-30); 'A Thematic Christian Arabic Bibliography 2006-2010,' *J ECS* 66 (2014, pp. 169-210); 'Ontmoeting Paus en Patriarch mei 2014. Haar oecumenische betekenis,' *Pokrof* (2014-4, 20-23); 'Christenen in het Midden-Oosten. Welke plaats in welke maatschappij?' in B. Pattijn & P. D'Hoine (eds), *Lessen voor de XXIste eeuw 2014. Herdenkenenvooruitgaan* (Leuven, 2014, pp. 161-176). Co-editor of *Christian Arabic Heritage*, *Eastern Christian Studies*, No.5 (Leuven, Peeters, 2004). Collaborator of the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Asian Christianity*.

He is member of the Editorial Board of several international scholarly periodicals, and Series in the field of Eastern Christianity.



Dr. Annie KUNNATH has done her Post-Doctoral research in Philosophy from *Le Fonds Ricoeur*, Paris (France). She holds: Joint Doctorate in Philosophy from the University of Poitiers (France), and the Catholic University of Paris (France); M.A. and M.Phil. in Philosophy from the University of Madras; B.Th. from the Catholic University of Paris (France). In addition, she holds an M.A.P. and M.Th. degrees in Theology and Religious Studies from the KU Leuven (Belgium). Her publications include *De l'homme faillible à l'homme de la reconnaissance. Une relecture de l'anthropologie herméneutique de Paul Ricoeur* (Lille, ANRT, 2013). She is currently Assistant Professor at the Centre for Comparative Religions and Civilizations, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.