



Religion and Innovation in Human Affairs (RIHA)

Exploring the Role of Religion in the Origins of Novelty and the Diffusion of Innovation in the Progress of Civilizations

Religion, Progress, and Innovation in the Contemporary World

The Christian Church and Political Freedom (\$250,000). Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, Georgetown University. PI: Timothy Samuel Shah (Georgetown University)

The Project explores the ways in which the Christian church has also been a source of civic innovation and political progress. To the extent that the Christian church has been a distinctive incubator of political innovation, the Project explores the numerous ways in which the intensifying worldwide persecution of the Christian church poses great dangers for global political progress. The Project therefore investigates two closely related sets of questions, one historical and one contemporary: 1) What have been the major and distinctive contributions of the Christian church in history to the origins and development of modern notions of a good and just civitas — notions now universally or near-universally considered positive innovations and marks of political progress — including religious freedom, limited government, and autonomous civil society? 2) When societies organize or permit the persecution of Christian churches, what opportunities for political innovation and progress do they forego?

Contrary to the prevailing orthodoxy, Christianity has, and continues to serve, as an incubator of political ideas of a good and just polity, including religious freedom, human rights, economic freedom, limited government, autonomous civil society, and democratic governance.

A genuine innovation in religious affairs, which our project deepens, is that the fusion of state and religious authorities corrupts or compromises the core message of the faith and thus dilutes its leavening role as an agent of free societies. Independence from the state, which Christian communities increasingly assert across the globe, helps to preserve this salvific message and its societal impact. The record in our forthcoming volumes should convince even skeptical readers that that Christianity nurtured freedom of conscience and continues to be a major force for the global protection of the right of religious liberty.

We discovered that the very association of Christianity with freedom is what often sparks harassment and persecution by state and societal actors hostile to such freedoms. In this sense, our project turns the Enlightenment narrative on its head and provides a compelling rationale for why public authorities and opinion leaders devoted to free societies must rise to the challenge of religious persecution in the 21st century. When widely diffused, the findings

and insights of this initiative will illuminate the landmark innovations of Christian teachings and practices. Even skeptics, we believe, will not be able to see the faith in the same way as before—a paradigm shift.

Major Outputs:

Books:

- Hertzke, Allen & Timothy Shah, eds. *Christianity and Freedom: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (manuscript under review)
- Nolte, A. J., ed. *Christianity & Freedom: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (manuscript in progress; under contract with Baylor University Press; expected publication in 2015)
- Shah, Timothy S. and Robert Louis Wilken, *Christianity and the Development of Religious Freedom* [Tentative title. Manuscript to be completed in 2015; expected publication in 2016.]
- Wilken, Robert Louis. *The Christian Roots of Religious Freedom* (Marquette University Press, 2014)

Conferences:

- *Christianity and Freedom: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives. Inaugural Symposium*, Georgetown University, December 14, 2012
- *Christianity and Freedom: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives. Landmark Conference*, Pontifical Urbaniana University, Rome, December 13-14, 2013 Website:
- *Christianity & Freedom: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Religious Freedom Project, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, Georgetown University)
<http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/rfp/themes/christianity-freedom-historical-and-contemporary-perspectives>

Media Events:

- “Five Myths About Global Christian Persecution,” Timothy Shah, *Fox News*, Dec. 10, 2013
<http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2013/12/10/five-myths-about-global-christian-persecution/>
- “No Tolerance without Christianity,” Kenneth Starr, *USA Today*, December 16, 2013
<http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2013/12/13/christianity-middle-east-persecution-column/4010181/>