

“Unethical Conversions?” An Analysis of Missionary Activities in Relation to Ethics and Human Rights

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Activities of people promoting various religions among others have frequently given rise to conflicting views of whether such activities are unduly hindered by state measures thus violating human rights, or whether on the contrary, that they violate the human rights of those targeted by such activities. Conflicts connected to missionary activities also constitute a very sensitive aspect of inter-religious relations that in some situations have even led to various forms of violent conflicts.

Buddhists in many Asian countries have in recent years become the target of missionary activities aimed at making them abandon their religion in favour of religions such as Christianity. These activities have in many cases been described as unethical, being seen as coercive and manipulative. Although unethical practices have been reported from many Buddhist countries there seems to be a lack of systematic studies regarding the criteria that define missionary practises as unethical. In the present paper these criteria will be explored. The issue of the extent to which missionary practises are protected by the conventions on human rights of the United Nations will also to be explored. The rights of those targeted by missionaries seem to have been less discussed than the rights of the missionaries. More emphasis to the situation of those targeted by missionaries has therefore been given in the present paper.

Missionary activities are also an important dimension of inter-religious relations. Exploring through inter-religious dialogue how a code of conduct for missionary activities may be established is also important for ensuring good relations between religions which is a significant factor in building harmony within societies and provide a context for the discussion presented in this paper. The role of governments in protecting individuals from unethical missionary practices will also be discussed in this connection.

1.0 Introduction

The term “missionary activity” is the term I suggest be used for the activity of “communicating a religion or belief through verbal communication or through various related activities as an invitation to others to accept it”. Other terms such as “proselytism” or “religious persuasion” are also used with more or less the same meaning as that of the definition above. A term used in some Asian countries is “conversion” referring to the activity of making a person convert from one religion to the other.

Taking about “missionary activities” one need to take into account the complexity of the concept. Looking at the main components of the concept of “missionary activity” I would highlight three:

Firstly, the missionary who may be an individual, or a specific organisation or more broadly a religious community, or even a government. A missionary may be involved in

missionary activities as a primary or fulltime activity or as a secondary or part-time activity. The involvement may also be indirect through various forms of support. As these different forms of involvements raise particular issues in relation to our main topic we will look at some of these specifically.

Secondly, the activities of the missionary. The activities covered by the term “verbal communication” constitute what we may call the core activities of missionary activities. It includes oral communication in formal or informal settings as well as written communication through books and pamphlets and the like. Of particular importance today are modern media such as radio, television and the Internet. The activities covered by the term “through various related activities” include a number of activities employed by missionary agencies in order to promote their religions. Through offering various social or educational services that are useful to others, irrespective of their interest in the religion of the provider of these services, missionary agencies may obtain a foothold in communities where they would otherwise not have been able to establish themselves. Such methods have therefore been much used but raise important issues regarding the ethics of missionary activities and will therefore be of particular interest in this paper.

Thirdly, the target group of the “missionary activities” which may be broadly or narrowly defined. Some missionary groups target particular people such as followers own their own religion that they think do not live up to the standards of their religion. But there are also many missionaries that think that followers of other religions need to abandon these religions in order to be saved from eternal damnation after death and therefore focus all their attention on those. Some missionaries are careful not to target groups such as minors with other religious backgrounds. Others may have no such qualms. Obviously such differences regarding the target group raise a number of issues relevant to this discussion.

In the following I will focus on possible constraints on missionary activities in the context of human right as defined in the international human rights conventions. I will therefore focus on the rights of individuals belonging to the target group to be protected from certain kinds of missionary activities.

But before doing that I will look at the protection given to missionary activities in the human rights documents. The most important one is the United Nation's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR), from 1966, article 18ⁱ. About 160 states have ratified the CCPR. Thus, there are good reasons for stating that the basic elements of the freedom of religion or belief as expressed in article 18 are international customary law. The CCPR, article 18, covers all forms of religion or belief. Issues relating to propagating atheism to religious people or religion to non-religious people are therefore also covered by this article.

The right to engage in missionary activities is not explicitly recognized in article 18. However, it is generally understood to be part of the “manifestation” of a religion or belief, as stated in paragraph 1 of the article, as “teaching” or as “practice”, the latter covering all thinkable forms of manifestations that are not explicitly mentioned in article 18. Closely connected to missionary activities is the right to “adopt a religion or belief of his choice” as stated in paragraph 1 of article 18 as well as the right not to be “subject to coercion which would impair his freedom ...to adopt a religion or belief of his choice” as stated in paragraph 2 in article 18. According to article 18 of the CCPR the right to

“adopt a religion or belief of his choice” can not be subjected any such limitations as applies to the right to manifest such religion or belief. Regarding the latter, paragraph 3 in article 18 of the CCPR states that it may only be subject “to such limitations as are prescribed by law, and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.” To the extent that missionary activities are defined as manifestation of religion or belief they are protected to the extent stated by paragraph 3, article 18, of the CCPR.

The possible ambiguity of article 18 of the CCPR in protecting missionary activities may be mitigated by the article on freedom of expression in CCPR article 19 which implies a right to disseminate information on one's belief, and to propagate religious convictions, “regardless of frontiers, orally, in writing or in print ...”. The possibility for the state to limit such expressions, as stated in article 19, paragraph 3, is similar to the limitation clause of article 18, paragraph 3, although with certain additional criteria (see below). Relevant in this connection is also the right to seek and to receive information, which is a right of individuals belonging to the target group, cf. article 19, paragraph 2. The freedom of assembly, stated in CCPR article 21, and the freedom of association in CCPR article 22, may be important for missionary societies, and for the assembly and association of those who have converted. The limitation clauses are similar to those of article 18.

My presentation of the right to engage in missionary activities, although brief, suggests that the core activity of communicating one's religion or belief is a fundamental human right. Even more so is the right to change one's religion according to one's choice without being subject to coercion or discrimination in any way. However, the question we need to explore is how far the right to communicate one's religion goes and how far one may go in claiming the protection of human rights in conducting various activities related to missionary endeavors.

2.1 Freedom of expression in the context of missionary activity

Dealing with missionary activity as verbal communication of one's religion or belief it is useful to consider article 19 of CCPR for its defense of the freedom of expression as well as for the limits it sets on this freedom. I will therefore quote the article in fullⁱⁱ:

1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.

2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.

3. The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:
 - (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others;
 - (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.

In paragraph 3 it reiterates the limitations in article 18. However it carries a distinction as it refers to the “rights or reputations of others” rather than the “rights and freedoms of others”. Before commenting on article 19 I would also like to quote article 20:

1. Any propaganda for war shall be prohibited by law.
2. Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.

Considered together these two articles outline the limitations for expressing religion or belief that are valid in terms of human rights. One relevant issue in this connection regards the issue of blasphemy. As far as CCPR is concerned there are no provisions justifying limitations on expressions that ridicule the beliefs of others. Human rights are supposed to protect human beings not their religions or beliefs. However one may argue that abusive speech regarding the beliefs of others may in certain cases violate the reputation of others or amount to advocacy of religious hatred that constitute incitement to hostility, as stated by the limiting provisions in article 19 and article 20. An issue, related to this, that have been brought up in relation to Buddhists in Sri Lanka are untruthful and denigrating remarks from some Christian missionaries about Buddhist monks to bring them into disrepute in order to facilitate easier acceptance of their Christian beliefs. Such remarks relate directly to “the reputation of others” as stated in article 19 of the CCPR. Making such statements punishable in national legislation would therefore not constitute a violation of human rights but rather a defense of it. The same may be said about the statement that was published a few years back on the Internet, from leaders of the so called “House Churches” in China that the SARS epidemic in 2003 was a punishment of the Chinese by the Christian God because they were increasing turning towards Buddhismⁱⁱⁱ. The reason in this case would be its being regarded a case of advocacy of religious hatred as described in article 20 of the CCPR.

Understanding freedom of religious expression in a manner that takes into account the limiting provisions in article 19 and 20 of the CCPR means to be sensitive to the context in which expressions occur. Allowing derogatory statements about a religion may be argued to be less defensible where they target marginalized and disempowered groups that may be in a weak position to express their beliefs as effectively as those who attack them.

Looking at this issue one need also maintain the distinction between legislation and ethics which leave open an area allowing inflammatory or derogative remarks that may be clearly unethical but not necessarily punishable by law as defined by the CCPR. However, issues such as these should not be ignored but dealt with through inter-religious dialogue.

2.2 Other limitations on the freedom of religious expression

The provisions in article 19 of the CCPR give a very limited scope for restricting any expressions including religious expressions. Can therefore religious expressions with a

missionary intent take place with no limitations for any reasons than those listed in article 19? Although this issue has not been very much discussed there are reasons to believe that the situation is not as simple as the CCPR may suggest. I will give a few examples illustrating this point:

In the Norwegian *Broadcasting Act*, which regulates all matters relating to radio and television in that country, there is the following paragraph:

Broadcasters may not broadcast advertisements to promote belief systems or political ends on television. This also applies to teletext services.

This means that promoting religion through buying advertisement on television is forbidden in Norway (but not promoting religion in this medium outside time allocated to advertisements). The second example is from China and was later published on an American Christian homepage:

4 Christians in Zhejiang Province Detained for Distributing Gospel Flyers
Posted Mar 04 2008

Zhejiang- CAA has learned that on January 31, 2008 public security officials detained 4 Christians for distributing Gospel flyers at a local bus station. The incident occurred at 10:00 PM in the General Bus Passenger Station of Taizhou which is within the border of Jiazhi neighborhood of Jiaojiang^v.

In this case there appears to be a restriction on distributing religious flyers in public places such as a bus station. Is this restriction in principle different from the restriction in Norway on religious advertisements? I think not. But are they both violations of article 19 of the CCPR? I think a decisive criterion for judging these cases to be the one or the other is whether the rules in these cases are applied impartially to all religions or beliefs or whether these are treated differently. In the CCPR there are provisions entailed in the general non-discrimination clauses of article 2, paragraph 2 and article 26, that the state cannot restrict (or favor) just one or some religions or beliefs. In the two cases mentioned there may be sound reasons for avoiding religious competition in certain public spaces without significantly restricting the free expression of religion^v.

This issue is even more relevant in the context of expressions that are more mission oriented. In the case of Thailand there have been reports of aggressive use by Christian missionaries of loudspeakers in villages in the northern part of the country. One observer wrote the following description: "In one village I noticed that missionaries had fastened loudspeakers to the trees. From morning until night the gospel blared all over the village. People complained but to no avail. The word of God was more important"^{vi}. I have myself noticed this kind of missionary activity in a Buddhist country when I visited the town of Chiengrai in northern Thailand in June 2006 where I observed a car being driven down a major street carrying loudspeakers and a big picture of the crucified Christ with the heading in English: "Doom after death" (and presumably the same in Thai). The point to remember here is that expressing one's religion should never mean imposing oneself upon others^{vii}. Unfortunately there are enough cases of religious groups that seem to

lack this understanding, suggesting a need for state authorities to intervene with appropriate legislation

I would also like to mention that in a situation of religious pluralism certain forms of propagating a religion may have negative effects. The distribution of the Christian Bible in hotels may be such a case. In a situation where a plurality of religions is found among the guests distributing the scripture of only one religion among them can easily become a point of irritation for guests of other religions. Deciding not to distribute Bibles in such a situation may thus be way of avoiding unequal treatment of religions and a way of preventing tensions from growing between their followers. The other alternative would of course be to make the scriptures of several religions available to the guests.

Acceptable practices may vary in this area depending on local circumstances and may be adjusted through changes in legislation as well as agreements between the parties involved.

3. 0 Various activities related to mission in relation to human rights

I raised the question of how far one may go in claiming the protection of human rights in conducting various activities related to missionary endeavors. In the context of many Asian countries this question seems to focus on the area of a) educational services, b) social services and c) general welfare and development programs. An overreaching issue seems to be that of how the missionary ought to relate to minors with different religious backgrounds.

3.1 Educational services

Historically Christian churches have put a lot on emphasis on providing educational services as have also Buddhist temples in some countries. Schools run by Christian denominations in Buddhist countries have during the modern period attracted many pupils from outside their own religious communities. Particularly in countries ruled by western colonial powers the combination of the need of the state for a western educated elite with the offering of western style Christian denominational education served to draw a significant part of the younger generation of Buddhists into a situation where they were heavily exposed to proselytism in Christian schools.

Sri Lanka is an example of this, being a country with a colonial history of almost 500 years. Modern education during this period became heavily dominated by Christian schools demanding participation in Christian worship from the Buddhist pupils as well as the study of the Christian religion^{viii}. Although a conscience clause introduced in 1920 allowed for withdrawal from religious subjects in denominational schools it was only with the nationalization of the Catholic and other denominational schools in 1960 that pupils gained the right of religious instruction in their own religion in all schools in the country^{ix}. Unfortunately we still see schools run by Christian denominations in many countries limiting religious instruction to its own religion whatever the religious background of its pupils.

As far as Human Rights are concerned we note that Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in dealing with the child's right to education in articles 28 and 29 do not

refer to the issue of religion. This issue is dealt with in article 14 which in paragraphs 1 and 2 says:

1. States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
2. States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.

This is generally thought to establish the right to denominational schools through which parents may “provide direction to the child” in accordance with their religious belief. The emphasis here is on the rights of the parents. To the extent existing public schools are effectively denominational or promoting an atheist ideology the right of parents to provide alternative education for their children comes into force. However, this is no *carte blanche* for religious groups to establish denominational schools as a means to promote their religion among adherents of other faiths. On the contrary, this right actually restricts the traditional practice of religious groups of establishing denominational schools for such purposes. Where such schools are allowed to operate, respecting the rights of parents as stated in article 14 of the CRC should be insisted upon in national legislation, ensuring that children are not exposed to religious propagation or involved in religious activities without genuine consent from their parents. When denominational religious education is given in a primary school, state authorities should, in my view, ensure that corresponding religious education, based on the other religions represented among the pupils, is also offered. It should also be noted that allowing denominational schools to monopolize education in a community may easily amount to jeopardizing the rights of parents as stated in article 14 of the CRC and should therefore as a rule not be allowed.

3.2 Kindergartens and preschools

The principle of the rights of parents, as stated in article 14 of the CRC, should also lead to a greater vigilance by state authorities in ensuring that this right is respected by religious organizations and NGOs offering kindergartens and preschools to children with religious background different from their own. It has been repeatedly observed in many Asian countries that Christian organizations offering such services in Buddhist communities propagate their religion without the consent of the children’s parents. Exacerbating this problem is the lack of transparency in such matters of some organizations providing such services. In other cases there is fair degree of openness about the denominational basis of such services. However, parents in disadvantaged circumstances may still find themselves in a situation where they have little choice but to accept exposing their children to religious propagation of an alien religion in order to provide their children with basic needs. It need be said that if state authorities are not capable of offering such services to their citizens they should at least ensure that parents are not coerced into refraining from exercising their authority in providing direction to their children’s upbringing in accordance with their religion.

3.3 Social services

Religious organizations have a long history of offering various social services such as orphanages, hospitals, clinics and charity of various kinds. This is laudable and religions should be given recognition and encouragement for doing so. The majority of such activities are also conducted in ways that respects the religious integrity of the recipients of such services. However, there are ample cases of organizations that have an understanding of such issues that leaves much to be desired.

After the Tsunami disaster in South Asia studies made by Save the Children and UNICEF, reported in national newspapers in Norway and Sweden^x, claimed that the children interviewed had been exposed to aggressive proselytising from a number of foreign Christian relief organisations, which they felt to be unpleasant and humiliating. The general message of those Christian organisations was reported to be that conversion to Christianity was a precondition for assistance. These methods did in some cases lead to rivalry and tensions between local people, between those who converted and received generous help and those who remained faithful to their own religion, who did not receive such help.

A problem encountered in discussing such issues is the lack of documentation of the problematic practices claimed to take place. In many cases the reports in local media are purely anecdotal and poorly documented.

However, in the age of the Internet missionary organisations do themselves provide ample documentation of cases of obvious unethical practises in these areas. One such case was published by a Christian church of the Baptist denomination from the United States regarding their activities in Thailand after the Tsunami in December 2004. A few excerpts from their report suggest their approach:

On a recent visit, a team of missionaries and Thais from the Bangkla Baptist Clinic-- joined by Tennessee Baptist volunteers--arrived in boats packed with medical supplies. It was the first time a doctor had entered the village. The team treated the sick, vaccinated children against diseases, installed a pump to give the village running water and helped Sian's church members share the gospel. Twenty-eight villagers became followers of Christ^{xi}.

A picture showing a group of local children being shown the picture of the crucified Christ had the following caption:

Volunteers from the Bangkla Baptist Clinic teach Mogen ("Sea Gypsy") children about Jesus while medical workers hold an open-air clinic nearby^{xii}.

The point here is not whether this form of aggressively promoting the Christian religion is effective or not. It is rather the fact that the report on this homepage reveals how certain religious groups have no qualms whatsoever in using whatever means they have at hand as tools to promote their religion. Practices such as those described here are widely seen as unethical. Clearly the majority of churches involved in humanitarian work would be quite responsive to the religious sensibilities of the receivers and would try to avoid mixing their humanitarian activities with promotion of their beliefs. The question is therefore: What can be done if such a sense of responsibility is not present, as we saw

in the example of the Baptist church just referred to. I think that first of all one need to realise that human rights such as those codified in CCPR, article 18, are concerned with not only the human rights of the missionary but also with those of the persons targeted by the missionary. CCPR, article 18, paragraph 2 says:

2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.

We are here talking about coercion that impairs the freedom of a person to maintain his own religion (including that of his child). I refer to article 26 in CCPR which says that the law shall prohibit any discrimination on any grounds such as religion. If a religious relief organization gives favorable treatment to those who accept their religion that will, in my view, constitute such a violation of article 26 in CCPR. Also, taking advantage of a situation where a person is in dire circumstances, needing the services offered by a religious organization, to propagate one's religion to such a person is highly unethical, if not a violation of the CCPR. Allowing a religious organization to abuse individuals in such a way is not promoting freedom of religion but rather the opposite. State authorities should therefore demand that religious organizations refrain from combining propagation of religion with humanitarian work.

3.4 Orphanages

Forms of social service that raise particular concerns are orphanages and similar institutions. A case where such concerns were raised happened in Malawi in Africa in September 2006 concerning a Taiwanese funded Buddhist orphanage.

The Malawi's Human Rights Commission ordered *The Amitofo Care Centre* to remove statues of Buddha from all dormitories, saying their presence amounted to brainwashing children into joining Buddhism against their will. Responding to concerns raised by the two government officials, the centre's director, Master Hui Li, said that while the centre was a Buddhist organization, no child was ever forced into becoming a follower of Buddhism. He said, however, that the centre emphasises to children the importance of respecting the religion which he said, preaches peace. He also called for the understanding of the government regarding the statues in the dormitories saying they were icons of peace and children should be guided and learn from them^{xiii}.

Although the present situation concerning this case is not known the case illuminates some of the dilemmas associated with providing services such as these. I think the guiding principle must be article 14, paragraph 2 of the CCPR concerning the rights of "the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child." This means that such institutions should be very careful in such matters and should avoid making such institutions recruiting grounds for new followers of the religion. In the cases where parents give their full support to a religious upbringing of their child in the religion of the institution the situation is of course entirely different.

Many Asian Buddhist countries seem to have a number of Christian orphanages where the children, whatever their religious background, are raised as Christians, with governments doing very little to protect the rights of their Buddhist parents or legal guardians. Some religious groups seem to regard an orphanage, not only as a tool to convert the children living there, but also as a means to convert the whole society, as we can read on the homepage of the *Care Corner Orphanage* in Chiangmai, Thailand:

For over ten years, Care Corner Orphanage has been a place where orphaned and underprivileged Thai children have found a loving home and a place to learn about the love of Jesus. Care Corner also believes God has called them into existence to influence all levels of Thai society with the life-changing message of Jesus Christ.

April 1995 was the inception of Care Corner Orphanage. It first started with twenty-eight children. In March of 1999, there were eighty-six children housed at the orphanage, and there were and still are many on the waiting list. ...

The goal of the ministry is to provide spiritual development based on the Bible, basic education, primary health care and the utmost moral guidance as they grow. We believe the Lord has called us to raise up an army for His Kingdom in Thailand, and to be a beacon for the Lord wherever we are. We are committed to establish the career of these children by creating jobs and micro enterprises and to train them into “tentmakers” and full-time servants for the ministry^{xiv}.

What we read about here is an institution with the stated aim of converting Thai children into becoming Evangelical Christians and to become part of an “army” to make Thailand a Christian country. The *Care Corner Orphanage* sees nothing wrong in this as they proudly proclaim their vision on their homepage. But I think it is fair to say that those who care about the human rights of parents would find such statements deeply disturbing.

3.5 General welfare and development programs

An area raising similar concern to those related to social and humanitarian services are general welfare and development programs. Although recipients of such programs may be less susceptible to religious coercion or manipulations than minors or people in dire circumstances there are still issues that need to be addressed. One concern is the transfer of power from local institutions to those organizations coming into the local community from the outside due to their superiority in the amount of resources to their disposal. A development organization with a religious basis differing from the traditional religion of the local community may at the very outset often not use its power to promote its religion. It is rather the effect of foreign organizations marginalizing traditional religious institutions that may pave the way for a subsequent and gradual promotion of the religion of the development organization. However, in many cases we observe that such organization may be rather impatient in starting to promote their religion. A case in point is *Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM)*, a Norwegian Protestant church which is registered in Mongolia as a development organization. The following description is found on the organization’s homepage:

NLM Mongolia was established and registered 7th April 1994, with the purpose to do development work and educate professionals within the sectors of agriculture, health and education in Mongolia. Soon after arrival of the first Norwegian ex pats, a home group of Bible study was started. In Ulaanbaatar they started in the home of Ljoekjell’s family and in Darkhan at the Hugdal’s family home. Reidulf Ljoekjell writes in his first annual report that their original idea was to concentrate on language and culture studies in the beginning, “then we could start with the most important! We soon discovered that God sometimes think very different from us”.

At the beginning of October 1994 the first home group in UB (Ulaan Baatar) was established, and the first baptism was held Easter Day, 1995.

The first Norwegian ex. pats came to Darkhan 1995, but here the authorities were more

suspicious towards NLM-M. Despite this a home group was established February, 1995. First member of this group that was baptised in March, 1997^{xv}.

What this means is that by accepting the development project of this organisation the Mongolian government also accepted Christian proselytising activities effectively funded by the Norwegian state. Accepting development help with such strings attached is in itself problematic. The fact that a government promotes the conversion of Mongolian Buddhists to Christianity through its funding of development assistance is, in my view, even more problematic. Religious organisations can and should engage in development activities but not combined with an agenda of converting followers of other religions into their faith. Preventing such misuse of development projects should be a priority of governments in Buddhist countries that will not weaken freedom of religion but strengthen it.

4.0 Missionary activities in relation to minors

We have seen that missionary activities conducted through educational services, social services and general welfare and development programs may have a strong focus on converting children. Such a focus is problematic as it violates the rights and duties of the parents in providing direction to the child in matters regarding religion, thus going against article 14 of the CRC. This is also an issue in other contexts of missionary activities. Sunday schools, holiday camps and various forms entertainment activities directed at children and youths are used by many Christian organizations as means to convert minors with other religious backgrounds^{xvi}. Doing this, without violating human rights as stated in article 14 of the CRC, requires informed consent from the parents of such minors. A few questions may be raised here. Firstly, how transparent are such organizations about the religious character of their activities? Not being transparent on this point would amount to a serious form of deception. And allowing this to happen would be a failure in upholding freedom of religion by the government. Secondly, how voluntary is consent from poor parents in disadvantaged communities concerning the participation of their child in a free holiday camp offered by a religious organization? Again we see that offering needed benefits with strings attached may easily become a form of coercion in matters of religion.

It may be argued that abstaining from doing missionary activities targeting minors should be a point agreed upon by religious groups as an important step in preventing tensions and conflicts between them.

5. Concluding remarks

As we have seen the CCPR and other conventions on human rights protect individuals targeted by missionary activities against abuse of their freedom of religion. Coercion and manipulation of individuals in poor communities by resourceful religious organisations coming in from the outside may therefore be claimed to constitute a real challenge to freedom of religion. To a certain extent this situation may be expected to improve through inter-religious dialogue and an agreement about codes of conduct for missionary activities. Such work is already under way in several places^{xvii}. However, assessing the situation realistically it also seems necessary to ensure through appropriate legislation that the rights of those targeted by missionary activities are not violated. To promote effective protection in accordance with the international conventions on human rights of

the rights of both parties in a situation of missionary activity broad discussions by the parties involved should be encouraged to take place. The need for a just implementation of law as well as adherence to ethics in this sensitive area of religious coexistence suggests that such discussions should be made a priority in exchanges between religions as well as between religious and non-religious people.

NOTES

CCPR art. 18 reads as follows:

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.
2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.
3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.
4. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

ii Documents concerning freedom of religion may be found on a number of home pages such as <http://www.pdhre.org/conventionsum/index4.html> . See also the homepage of The Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/InternationalLaw.aspx>

iii i

These views were published on a number of Christian homepages. See for instance:

<http://www.churchinperth.com/site/adetails.asp?ArticleID=1221>

iv i

See homepage of China Aid: <http://chinaaid.org/2008/03/04/bob-fu-to-be-awarded/>

v A particular dimension of this issue, which may modify the point made above, concerns religious expressions such as using church bells and prayer calls in environments populated by adherents of another religion as compared to environments where their adherents dominate.

vi v

From "Buddhas barn" (Norwegian) ("Buddha's Children"), T.Færøvik, Oslo 2006, p. 292.

vii The right to privacy as the right not to be targeted by proselytizing activities against one's will has not been much reviewed by legal experts. However, CCPR article 17 may be considered in this connection:

1. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation.
2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

viii v

A very vivid description of how it happened in the 19th century in Sri Lanka is found in: "Anagarika Dharmapala, A Biographical Sketch" Bhikshu Sangharakshita, BPS, Kandy 1964. pp. 9-17.

ix i

See "Religiousness in Sri Lanka" (edited by J.R.Carter), Colombo 1979, pp. 169-170 and p. 253.

x x

See the following newspapers: a) "Aftenposten" 02.01.06, b) "Svenska Dagbladet" 01.02.06, c) "Dagbladet" 02.01.06, d) "VG" 02.01.06, ao.

xi x

Article posted 12/02/05 ("Wave of hope sweeps Thailand in months after tsunami") on <http://www.baptiststandard.com> <http://www.baptiststandard.com/postnuke/index.php?module=htmlpages&func=display&pid=4304&print=1>

xii Ibid.

xiii x

See the following report on: <http://www.wwrn.org/article.php?idd=22906&sec=52&cont=3>

xiv The orphanage referred to is: Care Corner Orphanage Foundation 152, Moo 12, Ban Don Ton, Tambon Yuwa, Amphur Sanpatong, Chiang Mai 50120, Thailand. Its homepage is: <http://www.carecornerorphanage.com/about> .

xv x

See <http://www.nlmmon.org> . This homepage has also the following description of how this organization began its activities:

In 1994, NLM started to send Christian development workers to Mongolia. The Norwegian employees live in Darkhan and in the capital, Ulaanbaatar. ... NLM is registered to do development work in Mongolia. The employee's involvement in evangelising happens during their spare time. As a result of this, we find two congregations called „Bayariin Medee“, one in Ulaanbaatar and one in Darkhan. Both congregations have a Sunday school for children and several bible study groups. NLM gives financial support to Mongols so that they get the opportunity to get a theological education in Mongolia. ... NLM has four development projects in Mongolia. All the projects are 90% financed by NORAD (Norwegian Government Aid and Development Fund), and is a part of the Norwegian official development work

The Norwegian Lutheran Mission has stated that its goal for its work in Mongolia is as follows:

The main goal for our work in Mongolia as it is in all our countries – is to spread God's Kingdom.

We wish to build a Christian congregation in his country through evangelising.

At the same time we wish to help humans as a whole.

This means that activities within health, education and agriculture will be central in our effort from the moment we start working.

On this basis we wish to recruit Christian specialised workers that has a both a solid education within Christianity and a professional education/background –

that the Mongolian authorities can make a use of. In cooperation with Mongolian authorities we wish to give these employees positions that have as close cooperation with Mongolian authorities as possible.

xvi The following report from an American missionary working in Phuket, Thailand, from March 2008, give a first hand account of the emphasis on children and youths in missionary work:

We have 4 cell group Bible studies in neighboring villages and things are happening there too. A large piece of property has been donated to build a church, and a center for children and the elderly. One boy accepted Christ, whose Mom has been demon possessed but who is now saved. Two women accepted Christ at the Friday night meeting. We need the Lord to send us a children's worker or translator for Cindy to work with all the children in a separate program we have for the children on Saturdays. The weekly teaching schedule is: Wednesday morning staff meeting and prayer, then cell groups on Thursday in Khok Khloy in the afternoon, followed by one in Bo Don about 30 minutes north of Thachatchai, and then another cell group Bible study in a Buddhist shop back in Khok Kloy, and one cell group on Friday at the church house with a meal, in Thachatchai, and then Saturday afternoon there is a children's meeting 1:00 p.m. -3:00 p.m., followed by a youth meeting 3:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m., followed by worship practice 5:00 - 7:00 p.m. and then a prayer meeting from 7:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

(from <http://www.wdbydana.com/newsletter.html>)

xvii The Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief has a project on this issue. See <http://www.oslocoalition.org/mhr.php>