



ANJA HOFFMANN

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE OBSERVATORY ON INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN EUROPE

Anja Hoffmann is the Executive Director of the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe (OIDAC Europe). She holds a Master's degree in Human Rights with a specialisation in Religious Freedom. She has also studied transcultural communication and liberal arts. Before joining OIDAC Europe, she worked for several years in the Austrian Parliament. As Director of OIDAC Europe, she liaises with international institutions and the media, and has published reports and papers on the religious freedom of Christians in Europe.

The Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe (OIDAC Europe) is a research-based organization that systematically documents cases of violence and discrimination against Christians in Europe. This data is analysed and categorised in an annual report, which is widely covered in the European media and by international institutions.

As well as researching, documenting and reporting on these cases, OIDAC Europe also analyses the root causes and more subtle social phenomena that lead to restrictions on religious freedom. The organization has also released *Self-Censored*, a documentary about self-censorship among Christian university students.

Web links:

www.intoleranceagainstchristians.eu

www.youtube.com/@oidaceurope

www.x.com/OIDACEurope

www.facebook.com/OIDACEurope

www.instagram.com/oidaceurope

Self-Censored documentary link:

<https://youtu.be/CD3EJnDIbRk?si=Bp8Hmh8MOMGEzjS7>

Rediscovering the Language of Being

ANJA HOFFMANN

I was blessed to grow up in a Christian home, but I began to doubt the faith early in my life. For many people, it is personal suffering that makes them question whether there is a good God. My doubts were more fundamental: how do we know there is a God at all? And how do we know that we can know anything? In short, my challenge was relativism.¹

At university, my friends told me that it was okay to believe in God as long as you didn't claim that your personal belief was absolute truth or that you derived moral principles from your faith. "If you believe, that's fine, that's your truth. But who are you to tell me that it should be true for me?" In our cultural studies classes, I learned that all cultures and beliefs are equal, and that we only prefer our own because we grew up with it and the conventions that surround us tell us it is the norm.

But if my faith was just a personal preference, what was it worth? In the atmosphere of my university, all my religious beliefs seemed to shrink to a lifestyle choice, leaving me with nothing but myself as a reference point for deciding what was true and what was good and evil - until something changed.

First, and perhaps most importantly, I had an encounter with the True Living God. From the outside it was as unspectacular as anything could be. I was praying in a chapel. Yet it changed my life. I suddenly realised that I was a creature. That I had not created myself. That I had received my life, my soul and my being from another - a Creator.

Secondly, I began to study human rights and realised how self-contradictory relativism is: if there is no such thing as a God-given human nature, why should there be human rights? I began to see that people actually *do* share a fundamental understanding of the dignity of the human person, from which we derive certain principles. And if we agree that every human being has this inviolable human dignity, from which certain inalienable human rights flow, then there must be a source of this dignity. How else could the whole human family around the world share a common understanding of justice, courage and righteousness if there was no source of these principles, if there was no truth?

I realised that it is actually *being itself* that tells us - yes, almost shouts at us - that there is a Creator. "Conscience is (...) reason open to the language of being," Pope Benedict XVI told the German parliament in a ground-breaking speech in 2011.² The truth is before our eyes. And if we choose not to cloud our vision with ideology or unbelief, but open ourselves to the language of being, we will find overwhelming evidence of a carefully designed order - around us and within us.

Footnotes:

1. The doctrine that knowledge, truth, and morality exist in relation to culture, society, or historical context, and are not absolute.
2. "The Listening Heart. Reflections on the Foundations of Law", Address of Pope Benedict XVI at the German Bundestag, September 2011, available at: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110922_reichstag-berlin.html