

## Book reviews

### **Inside the Church of Almighty God: The most persecuted religious movement in China**

Massimo Introvigne

*New York: Oxford University Press, 2020, 149 + xi pp., ISBN 978-0190089092, £ 21.99*

Since the 1990s, reports about the activities of a Chinese religious movement called The Church of Almighty God (CAG, also known as “Eastern Lightning”) have been circulating. In 2014, the movement attracted wider attention when it was named by international media in connection with a brutal murder at a McDonald’s restaurant in the Chinese province of Shandong. Intense persecution led to an increasing number of CAG refugees seeking asylum in other countries. This scenario provides the background for Introvigne’s investigation.

Introvigne is an Italian sociologist specializing in new religious movements and religious pluralism. Besides being the managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions in Turin, Italy, he has served with various international bodies dealing with religious freedom. In 2017, he was among a group of Western scholars invited by Chinese anti-cult organizations to attend two conferences on combatting CAG. This visit gave him some detailed insights which have been incorporated into his monograph, originally published in German in 2019. The English-language edition adds an introduction and an epilogue that places the investigation in the broader context of the development of policies on religion in China from 1949 to the present.

Introvigne’s thorough evidence collection is based on interviews conducted in 2017–2019 with CAG members outside China and conversations with Chinese police, officials and scholars engaged in anti-CAG campaigns (x–xi). He documents the severity of abuses of CAG members (chapter 1), investigates the basis for their criminal conviction (chapter 2), and elaborates on CAG’s teachings, developments and organization (chapters 3–5). In doing so, he refutes allegations that the movement’s rapid growth is due to manipulative techniques such as brainwashing and alienation from family.

The CAG believes that Jesus Christ has returned in the shape of a Chinese woman who is “identified by the CAG as Almighty God” and whose utterances are considered to have the same authority as the Bible (29). Starting in 1995, large groups of Christians from different Christian denominations (particularly house churches) converted to CAG (37–38). Its rapid growth alarmed the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which regards CAG as “a threat more dangerous and massive than Falun Gong” (xi).

Chapter 2 explains the rationale underlying the criminalization of CAG and other so-called *xie jiao* (“evil cults”) in China. Introvigne provides a very helpful in-

roduction to the concepts of sinicization and *xie jiao*, which are of general relevance for understanding the CCP's approach to religious freedom. Both concepts have their roots in Chinese history. In the Middle Ages, to "sinicize" referred to the adoption of "Chinese culture, language, and customs" required of ethnic minorities (16-17). Since the CCP regards itself as representing the Chinese people, to be sinicized today means "to be fully integrated into in the CCP-dominated Chinese system" (17). Only "fully sinicized religions . . . are allowed to operate publicly under the control of and with leaders appointed by the CCP" (17), and constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion applies only to this kind of religious organizations.

Whereas most "non-sinicized" churches (such as the many house churches) manage to exist in the "gray market," some of them are persecuted by the government as *xie jiao*. This term "was rooted in a century-old tradition of Chinese millenarian movements trying to take over the government" and later became the CCP's favorite term for condemning the alleged danger of Falun Gong. Following the centuries-old custom of Chinese emperors, the CCP in 1995 published a list of *xie jiao*, and CAG was on it (19-20). In 1997 "'using' a *xie jiao*" was included as a crime in the Chinese Criminal Code, "punishable with jail sentences from three to seven years" (21). Thus, all members of religious movements listed as *xie jiao* are criminalized and subject to persecution by branches of the Chinese Anti-Cult Association.

In chapters 6 and 7, Introvigne discusses in detail the aforementioned murder of a customer in a McDonald restaurant in 2014 and an alleged kidnapping (in 2017) of Christian leaders during theological training programs conducted by CAG members who had hidden their connection to the organization. The author demonstrates the purposeful construction and dissemination by Chinese media of fake news about crimes committed by CAG members, so as to justify the harsh persecution CAG had experienced since the early 2000s and so as to counter international criticism (81-83, 102-3). Based on his thorough research, Introvigne dismisses both allegations. One shocking detail is that many Western media uncritically reproduced the allegations of Chinese state media, thereby contributing to the careless criminalization of CAG members (82).

The author's quest to defend CAG causes him to make some unnecessarily biased statements about the credibility of the narratives of Christian leaders affected by the "kidnapping," even implying that some pastors fabricated alleged CAG material to support the accusations because they were annoyed about "sheep stealing" (115).

The book culminates with the concise description of the fate of CAG refugees who have been denied asylum because of persisting prejudices against CAG (chapter 8). Introvigne introduces the six main objections to CAG asylum seekers and dismisses each of them, referring to the facts presented in the previous chapters.

Besides serving the cause of CAG refugees, Introvigne provides well-informed insight regarding the anti-cult policy of the CCP. Beyond this, the book shows us

how easily discourses on heterodox religious movements can be instrumentalized by authoritarian regimes.

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### **Freedom of religion or belief: Creating the constitutional space for fundamental freedoms**

Paul T. Babie, Neville G. Rochow and Brett G. Scharffs (eds.)

*Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2020, 416 pp., ISBN: 978-1788977791, US \$170.00*

This book is a collection of papers delivered at two 2018 consultations in Australia that focused on creating constitutional space “for people and communities to work out their deeper moral and religious ways of living their lives” (10). That year marked the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 18 of which guarantees religious freedom. Article 29 of the UDHR recognizes the need for mechanisms to guarantee rights. As Australia does not have a constitutional bill of rights, one theme explored at the conference was whether such a bill of rights would provide stronger protection for religious freedom.

The book is divided into two parts, likely reflecting the two conferences. The first part contains a strong set of papers on what it means to create constitutional space for religious freedom; the second part explores a variety of comparative jurisdictions.

Opening part one, Carolyn Evans and Cate Read review the history of a constitutional bill of rights in Australia, noting that when it was proposed, religious organizations opposed it. Now that same-sex marriage has been legalized, religious institutions are seeking legislation to protect religious freedom. Evans and Read argue that constitutional protection would provide the best protection for them.

The Australian Constitution contains some protection of religious freedom in section 116. Renae Barker and Joshua Forrester’s articles consider how the Australian courts have interpreted freedom of religion. Neil Foster addresses the specific tensions created for religious adherents when same-sex marriage was legalized.

Five articles address various aspects of religious freedom protection more generally. Joel Harrison argues against the Western conception of religious liberty as tied to individual autonomy; he would prefer to see governments facilitating communities of virtue that pursue God. Mark Fowler calls on the state to create space for faith-based institutions. Alex Deagon addresses the challenging task of defining religion and religious freedom. Jeremy Patrick identifies the challenge of religious freedom in the current religious climate, in which believers can choose among a smorgasbord of religious beliefs and practices. Finally, Brett Scharffs provides

a conceptual framework concerning reasonable accommodation. His three paradigms are very useful as states deal with the complexities of religious adherents seeking to live consistently with their faith.

Part two, which looks at constitutional frameworks and interpretation in Croatia, Iraq, India, China and Malaysia, will be of general interest to religious freedom advocates. Mark Hill contributes a helpful chapter on religious freedom and employment cases in Europe. The selection of countries is not clear, as most have little in common with Australia. However, the country profiles are very well written and informative, providing current analyses of how the state understands and applies religious freedom. Two of the profiles stand out. The chapter on Iraq contains a helpful review of religious freedom in Islamic human rights documents. This is important as many Islamic countries do not respect religious freedom for minority religions in their countries. The chapter on China is also helpful in interpreting the nature and scope of the crackdown on religions there since 2018.

In addition to the country profiles, Paul Taylor, in an article on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, notes that Australia's current protections of associational and expressive rights do not meet the covenant's requirements.

This book focuses heavily on constitutional law and practice. It will appeal to the many legal advocates worldwide who address religious freedom. It also offers a very helpful comparative analysis of countries where religious freedom is constitutionally protected but not protected in practice.

As a Canadian with long experience in both domestic and international religious freedom, I found much of interest in this book. As with many books of this type – edited compilations of conference papers – some chapters will be of more interest than others to any given reader. Few people will read all of them. The papers do not build on one another; they are entirely discrete and distinct.

No doubt, Australians will find the chapters on their country to be of great interest. Many of the issues Australia is experiencing are common amongst Western countries, particularly those where same-sex marriage has been legalized.

Several of the conceptual chapters are helpful for those who work on religious freedom issues and wish to strengthen their philosophical underpinnings. I found Brett Scharffs' article on reasonable accommodation to be one of the most helpful analyses I have seen on this troublesome issue. I also admire Alex Deagon for taking on the challenging issue of defining religion.

This book is a very interesting and useful contribution to the literature on constitutional protection of religious freedom.

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## Constitutions and religion

Susanna Mancini (ed.)

Cheltenham, UK, Edward Elgar, 2020, 464 pp., ISBN 978-1786439284, £48.00

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*Constitutions and religion* is a welcome and ambitious publication on law and religion from a comparative constitutional law perspective. The book mainly investigates the place and impact of religion in constitutional frameworks across the globe, as well as the resulting problems that arise. In addition, it incorporates a reverse emphasis on the impact of state structures on religion and religious freedom. Within these broad frameworks, a variety of highly relevant and relating concepts are discussed, including religious nationalism, social integration, immigration, different claims to modernism, the rejection of Western secular modernism, reasonable accommodation, education, marriage, euthanasia, feminism and the divide between the *forum internum* and *forum externum*. Methodologically, the book embraces an interdisciplinary approach to law, political theory, history, and regional and international legal systems.

The introductory chapter sets the stage with a vivid and concise overview of the legacy and present-day challenges of the Enlightenment project as it relates to religion within various constitutional frameworks. Amongst these challenges, the re-politicization of religion (where the neat separation between faith and reason is challenged), resulting religious nationalism, religious populism and recent religious-based claims to conscientious objections are highlighted.

The first of the book's five parts discusses the theoretical concepts and historical background relevant to and necessary for a discussion of constitutional frameworks and religion. These concepts include secularism and the West, the theoretical framework of Islamic constitutionalism and the modern contours of religious freedom rights. Chapter 3 (by Ratna Kapur) discusses how secularism can surprisingly be used in both the West (France) and non-West (India) to reinforce religiosity and majoritarianism.

Part two presents different models of religion and state across the globe by grouping countries according to either regional criteria (Western Europe, North America, Latin America, Africa) or functional criteria (Islamic constitutions, constitutionalism in the Buddhist tradition and constitutionalism in Jewish democratic states). There are also specific chapters on the unique situations in Russia and India. Chapter 6 (by Silvio Ferrari) posits the interesting, challenging and possibly controversial premise that the European regulation of freedom of religion as the right of every individual (regardless of the religion or belief being professed) cannot be reconciled with some religions or practices (such as Islam), because these religions or practices are not reconcilable with Europe's Christian and secular tradition.

Part three discusses religion as an active catalyst in constitutional law-making and its effects on and involvement in politics. This part is especially insightful in light of the current resurgence in (religious) nationalism and populism. Chapter 15 (Francesco Biagi) reveals the extensive engagement of religion in the constitution-making process in various countries. This is surprising since the role of religion in constitutional law-making is seldom considered (and possibly underestimated).

Part four offers a regional perspective on the position of religion and religious freedom rights by focusing specifically on the complex, rich and diverse jurisprudence found within the European Court of Human Rights and the European Union.

The last part, most relevantly and incisively, discusses the current challenges (sometimes within specific geographic frameworks) that arise from religious freedom rights, including gender justice, religious-based conscientious objection, the integration of Islam in Europe and blasphemy and pluralism in India. Chapter 20 (Susanna Mancini and Elena L. Cohen) puts the spotlight on the complex issue of balancing religious minority rights and women's rights, asking whether it is possible for the two to co-exist. Chapter 20 also indicates how arguments designed to undergird "living together" and "social integration" (especially in the headscarf cases at the European Court of Human Rights) can violate women's rights and perpetuate patriarchy.

It would have been interesting to see some focus on the position of new religious movements (not only religious minorities) within constitutional frameworks. Furthermore, given the substantial emphasis on the European regional frameworks, greater coverage of other regional frameworks, such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and Courts (mentioned sporadically), could have been useful. But in general, this book is a welcome publication as there are few interdisciplinary volumes that focus on law and religion from a comparative constitutional law perspective.

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## **Influence with respect**

Carsten Hjorth Pedersen

*Oregon: Resource Publications/Wipf and Stock, 2020, 100 pp., ISBN 978-1725256606, US \$17.00*

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Pedersen aims to lift the fog of misunderstandings around "worldview neutrality" in Western societies that has left many parents, educators and leaders in fear of being stigmatized if they express their convictions. Its basic tenet is that every en-

counter between two individuals involves influencing. Therefore, the question is not *whether* we influence, but *how*.

Secularized Western societies have increasingly reproached religious groups for exerting a bad influence on their children by indoctrinating and radicalizing them. This perception has been triggered primarily by violent groups of Muslims, but Christians have been painted with the same brush. As a result, many Christians have become intimidated. On the other hand, consumerism has become the mainstream religion, if not itself an oppressive one, and is blind to its own indoctrination.

The author has been the director of the Danish Christian Institute for Education since 1999 and is also the father of three grown children and a teacher and preacher. He reminds us that in education we have a responsibility to influence those entrusted to us – whether they are children, youths or adults – towards a fruitful, responsible “good” life. In a democratic and pluralistic society such as ours, there must be room and respect for a diversity of views as to what a good life means. “Since we all have certain convictions – even if we are not aware of them – it is not the conviction itself that is problematic. It can be false or untrue, but that is not the issue. But the *manner* in which we pass on that conviction can be more or less positive, appropriate or legitimate“ (4).

Pedersen points out that there can be “too much” or “too little” influence: “I concluded that things go wrong when the person who carries the pedagogical responsibility either comes too close or remains too distant” (p. 15). To find the right balance, he presents a very helpful analytical guide composed of the following categories:

Too much or too strong an influence: Pederson calls this *intimization*, or violating the sphere of intimacy which protects every individual.

Too little or too weak an influence (*desertion*): neglecting the responsibility of pedagogical influence and leaving the individual abandoned in the storm of worldviews.

The right amount and approach of influence: this encompasses two components. *Confrontation* entails giving guidance, including passing on one’s own convictions and worldview, while respecting the individual’s boundaries and avoiding indoctrination (which does not allow questions and contradiction). *Withdrawal* is the necessary counterpart to confrontation; it allows space for the individuals being influenced to develop their own independence.

As intricate relationships do not involve simple recipes, the book provides many examples from different contexts, in an easy-to-understand English style translated from the original Danish.

Although the book seeks primarily to encourage intimidated or assimilated Christians in secularized Denmark, I think it is equally important for secularists

and people of any religious belief in Western society. “It is naive to believe that the agnosticism and religious relativism of mainstream culture are neutral positions which automatically eliminate the risk of indoctrination, social control, and force” (69). This statement is absolutely true, and accordingly I regret that the book does not offer more examples from atheist or secular contexts.

In chapter 6, Pedersen discusses how educators and leaders can learn the skills of influencing with respect. These skills can be categorized under the two dimensions of *empathy* and *maturity*. “Empathy is the ability to put yourself in someone else’s shoes without giving up your own position. . . . It is a skill that can be actively developed” (77). Referring to Ulla Holm’s book *Empathy for Professionals*, he identifies the factors underlying development of empathy as a secure identity, the ability to assess emotional expressions and to manage one’s own emotions, and the ability to tolerate and to embrace other people’s emotions.

*Maturity* does not come automatically with age but is the result of discipline in developing in such areas as accepting responsibility, collaborating with people of a different mindset, recognizing our dependence on others, prioritizing long-term over short-term goals, admitting our own dark sides, and accepting both the wonderful and the difficult sides of life.

Chapter 7 points out that the receiving person in the process of influencing also carries a responsibility – obviously less so with smaller children and more so with increasing maturity. Children can best be equipped to counteract transgressive influence if their parents and educators model respectful methods of influence, thus building in them a secure identity. But “I also believe it is possible and important that we dare to speak to children, young adults, and grown-ups about positive and negative forms of influence” (88).

The final chapter, entitled “Love Requires Nearness and Distance,” places the book’s subject in the universal perspective of the relationship between God and mankind: “Jesus’ respect for us is so strong it includes the freedom to reject him” (100).

I hope that this book will serve as a beacon of light in the darkness of misconceptions about neutrality in education – for educators, administrators and politicians alike. Its well-built structure and its clever theory seem well suited for this purpose. I equally hope that it will be read by people of all faiths and none, and that they will adapt its insights to their own circumstances, forgiving the book’s narrower emphasis on people of Christian backgrounds.

*Matt Kaegi, Board member and former chairperson of EurECA (European Educators Christian Association), a network of the European Evangelical Alliance*

## **Why religious freedom matters for democracy: Comparative reflections from Britain and France for a democratic “*vivre ensemble*”**

Myriam Hunter-Henin

Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2020, 202 pp., ISBN: 978-1509904747, £50

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In this book, Myriam Hunter-Henin offers a novel perspective on law and religion, along with a methodical demonstration that religious freedom is valuable not only for believers but also for democracy and our shared desire to live well together (*vivre ensemble*).

The author explores the connections between religious freedom and democracy – comparing French *laïcité* and British church establishment, assessing recent case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in the spheres of employment and provision of services, and adding some perspectives on US case law. Hunter-Henin proposes conceptual guidelines to resolve religious controversies in a consistent way in today's diverse societies.

The virtuous cycle of “properly construed” religious freedom, healthy pluralism and invigorated democracy is thoroughly explained so as to show how connections between them can create the desired *vivre ensemble* as suggested by John Rawls. According to the author, religious freedom is both a positive freedom, enabling the expression of a plurality of worldviews and ways of life in a common framework of equality and respect, and a negative and defensive liberty, in particular against the power of the state.

Drawing from contextual analyses in France and Britain, Hunter-Henin examines the reasons for the currently broken *vivre ensemble* in both countries. In her opinion, both French *laïcité* and British church establishment exhibit the required features for a secularism amenable to pluralism. Both have gone beyond the stage of “militant secularism” (imposing common national values upon all, with an assimilationist approach unsuitable for multi-religious and multicultural societies) and “separatist secularism” (embodied in negative constitutionalism, based on a strict dividing line between non-institutional spheres with no interference by the state and an institutional sphere where citizens accept the restriction of their liberties). However, both fail to achieve “inclusive secularism,” based on positive constitutionalism, under which “religious freedoms are not only protected against state interference but valued as a positive good, capable of enriching political debate and contributing to society.” French secularism tends to relegate religion to the private sphere, with an assertion of national common values in the public sphere. Across the Channel, social divisions, inequality for certain minority groups, a strong narrative on fundamental British values,

and fear of terrorism have undermined religious freedom. In both contexts, national values seem to serve as a refuge against the fear of religious (in particular Islamic) radicalization and terrorism, thus prompting certain illiberal and exclusionary trends.

As a remedy to such worrying trends, the “liberal democratic *vivre ensemble*” offers a positive conceptual framework. Indeed, religious freedom matters for all citizens. To eliminate the concept of religious freedom, considering that secular interests are equivalent, would undermine the importance of religious identity, commitments and views in our democracy and would be costly to all citizens, even non-believers. Additionally, the liberal democratic framework matters for the protection of religious freedom as a principle of non-interference and as a guarantee of pluralism. Finally, the *vivre ensemble* may be attained only if, in return, religious citizens endorse the idea of liberal reciprocity, thus accepting legitimate constraints. Hence, “inclusive secularism” stems from a form of membership of citizens in a political community, where religious freedom can be both restricted in matters pertaining to public reason and protected and promoted, so as to achieve equality and reciprocity.

Based on studies of recent ECtHR and CJEU case law in the workplace and commercial sectors, Hunter-Henin suggests useful guidelines for judges that could enable a “mended *vivre ensemble*” in the field of religious controversies. Her proposed method is grounded in three principles: avoidance, which guarantees the state’s neutrality towards comprehensive religious doctrines; inclusion, which guarantees equality and fair terms of cooperation between religious and non-religious citizens; and revision, which guarantees that the terms of legitimate diversity are subject to constant review.

The author offers a solid and detailed case law analysis relating to religious discrimination at work, in particular concerning the wearing of religious symbols, religious employers and the extent of their legitimate requirements towards employees, providers of service, and employees refusing to perform certain services for religious reasons. Hunter-Henin recommends that courts adjudicating religious freedom cases rely on the claimant’s subjective assessment of religious belief or practice, and she says they should avoid delegating the power of decision to the assessment of the tensions of the employers or conferring unfettered discretion upon the Member States through the margin of appreciation or the imposition of national values. She proposes that courts should use the proportionality test without flawed interpretation in conducting a fair judicial review in conjunction with the principle of inclusion.

This book should contribute to solving contemporary controversies over religious claims while fostering an inclusive, tolerant and vibrant *vivre ensemble*, especially for our Western liberal democracies.

## **Anti-Christian violence in India**

Chad M. Bauman

*Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020, 302 pp., ISBN 978-1501750687, US \$34.95*

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The persecution of Christians in the Middle East and some parts of Africa has captured the attention of many observers over the past two decades, but the plight of Indian Christians commonly remains on the sidelines. One reason for this oversight is that Indian Christians reside in a democracy that at least putatively guarantees their rights to religious freedom. The Hindu nationalist movement targeting Christians for harassment and violence has spiked only during the last decade. Incidents involving Indian Christians affect a small proportion of the country's almost 1.5 billion residents. And their daily suffering is not usually as severe as that endured by Christians fleeing the Islamic State or Boko Haram.

The dramatic events that took place in India's Kandhamal district in 2008 are the exception to this last rule. In this book, Chad Bauman explains how the rioting and murder of several Christians, credible reports of rape, the destruction of homes and churches, and the displacement of thousands of people relate to broader anti-Christian agitation. He argues that violence and intimidation against Christians are routine in India, and that the violence in Kandhamal arose out of fertile fields of animosity.

As an academic, Bauman wishes to fashion a theoretical explanation for anti-Christian violence in India that will appeal to a wide variety of disciplines. He argues that although economic and instrumentalist explanations for such violence are helpful, they should be combined with a constructivist attentiveness to how worldviews or "cosmologies" contribute to the framing of interreligious relations. Bauman lays out a lengthy "prehistory" of Hindu-Christian relations to provide context for the layperson. While "Indian Christian communities were relatively well integrated within Indian society" in antiquity (67), the colonial era upset relations between indigenous Hindus and Christians. The introduction of the Inquisition under Portuguese colonizers in Goa in 1560 contributed to the perception of Christianity as a "predatory, imperialistic religion" (71). Western Christian missions gradually began to win converts in the 1800s, particularly in the wake of dramatic famines, during which Christian missionaries fed lower-caste communities and took in large numbers of orphaned children (91). But the growing number of Christians under Western imperial rule exacerbated tensions between the communities.

In response, Hindus formed a religious nationalist movement now known as Hindutva ("Indianness"). Bauman argues that Hindutva arose largely during the early 1900s as a reaction to the secular modernity epitomized by Christian mission endeavours. Although Christians were not presenting a secular gospel, "the advance of Christianity cannot be disentangled from the advance of Western secular modernities. They

represent an amalgamated threat; resistance to one is tantamount to resistance to the other” (55). Christianity required Indians to accept a worldview in which religion stood as a universal concept detached from ethnicity. In response, Hindutva represented a defence of Hinduism from the cultural imperialism of Europeans and identified Christian evangelism as an existential threat to the preservation of Indianness.

The agent of Hindutva that arose in the twentieth century was the Sangh Parivar (family of organizations). These include the pre-independence Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, or National Volunteers Organization), along with a variety of newer local and national offshoots such as the Bajrang Dal youth league, the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti, and the Vishva Hindu Parishad. Today, Hindutva has become the dominant perspective of the Indian government, represented by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). At independence, these groups formed a minority opposition to the ruling Indian National Congress and argued for including a ban on conversion in the 1950 constitution (97). Such a clause was not included at that time, but several states have since instituted anti-conversion acts known paradoxically as “religious freedom” ordinances. The Indian Supreme Court has deemed such laws constitutional, presuming that the right to propagate one’s religion extends only to the transmission of the tenets of one’s religion, not to conversion.

Activities leading to conversions from Hinduism to Christianity have become central focal points in anti-Christian violence. In the wake of an anti-Christian riot in the Dangs, Gujarat, in 1998, BJP Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee called for a national dialogue on conversion, as if conversionary activities justified the violence (116). Twelve days later, Graham Staines, a Christian missionary, was immolated together with his two young children.

The activities of an organization linked to the Sangh Parivar were at the heart of the riots that engulfed Kandhamal in 2007-2008. Multiple layers of identity and politics lay behind the violence, including caste, indigeneity, religion, ideology, and socio-economic rivalries. Two indigenous communities, the Kandhas and the Panas, as well as an upper-caste group known as the Oriyas, were involved. The Panas are a lower-caste community, most of whom have embraced Christianity, and made up the majority of the victims of the violence. The riots were triggered by the murder of Swami Lakshmananda, a Hindutva activist, at the hands of the Maoist Naxalite militia on 23 August 2008. Sangh activists and many within the Kandha and Oriya communities presumed that Christians widely sympathized with the Naxalite movement and blamed them for the murder. This unleashed a massive pogrom against the Pana Christian communities.

Before presenting the details of the Kandhamal case, Bauman provides an overview of anti-Christian agitation in India using data from the Evangelical Fellowship of India, the media, and other sources. He notes that anti-Christian attacks typically follow three “discrete scripts” undertaken by religious nationalist vigilantes: attacks on evangelists

or Christian leaders engaging in evangelism, targeting of churches and other Christian organizations suspected of engaging in conversion activities, and harassment, mocking, or beating of female converts (118-126). Anti-Christian activities are most common in a particular group of states and in suburban and rural areas. Notably, these states and communities lie not in the central heartland of Hindutva activism but in regions where the BJP and its allies continue to vie for power with rival organizations, and where the greatest numerical growth of Christianity has occurred (138).

Throughout this book, Bauman takes seriously the various interrelated factors that contribute to anti-Christian violence in India. He demonstrates that the violence is intertwined with economic competition between various groups, the politics of caste, the legacy of colonialism, and the strategic choices made by the national leadership of the governing parties and courts. Nevertheless, he also acknowledges the impact of the ideological dispute between the universalizing understanding of religion propounded by global Christianity and the nativist sentiments of Hindutva.

Bauman urges Western readers to take seriously Hindutva's opposition to what it perceives to be an imperialistic urge in Christian demands for religious freedom. However, there is a danger that taking such arguments at face value does not hold the BJP and the Sangh Parivar to account for the essential contradiction at the heart of contemporary Hindutva. India's BJP rhetorically embraces globalization. Its program seeks to open India to the world through market competition, improved productivity, and investment growth. The country has made significant efforts to deregulate the Indian market. Yet while "many members of Sangh organizations . . . seek the potential benefits of economic globalization, they continue to resent the loss of sovereignty that taking advantage of those benefits requires" (226). The BJP and its allies will ultimately need to make a choice between prosperity and a defensive reaction to modernity. Their consistent choice in favour of the latter only endangers their pursuit of the former.

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### **The disappearing people: The tragic fate of Christians in the Middle East**

Stephen Rasche

*New York: Bombardier Books, 2020, 176 pp., ISBN 978-1642932034, US \$27.00*

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Many scholars and activists have lamented the dramatic decline of Christians in the Middle East over the past decade, but few have the sort of front-line experience that fills the pages of this book. Rasche describes the tragedy that has befallen the last

communities of Christians remaining in Iraq since 2003 after the chaos of the US occupation, the rise of majoritarian politics, and the war against the Islamic State.

An American lawyer, Rasche worked with the Chaldean archdiocese in Erbil to respond to the challenge of the 2014 refugee crisis and its aftermath. Despite the apparently broader geographic scope expressed in the title, the book's focus is on Iraq. It reads as a series of vignettes from the author's work in northern Iraq and lacks either an academic focus or a chronological structure.

Rasche's introduction is sobering. He says he is writing primarily because "the sand has nearly run out in the hourglass that is Christianity in Iraq" (xix). Christians were forced to flee the city of Mosul and the surrounding Nineveh Plain in summer 2014. Most of them went first to Ankawa, on the outskirts of the city of Erbil, within the area ruled by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). Three years later, those few who remained were encouraged to return to their homes in the towns of the plain. Rasche explains how the effort to restore these refugees' lives has been difficult and, in many cases, futile.

Although the KRG provided a safe haven for the refugees, it was up to the churches to provide for their day-to-day needs. As a result, "the Chaldean Catholic Archdiocese[, and] the Syriac Catholic and Orthodox churches of Mosul and Nineveh, became full-time humanitarian aid workers" (48). Christians were unwilling to go to UN-sponsored camps, because they feared marginalization and even persecution at the hands of local workers, invariably hired from the majority population. Instead, they trusted the churches, which shouldered the herculean task of feeding and sheltering them for three years.

Rasche recounts how Christians returning to the Nineveh Plain in the wake of the defeat of the Islamic State faced similar challenges, since relief workers and the Iraqi state were now in the hands of unsympathetic non-Christians. He describes how UN agencies such as UNICEF claimed to be restoring mostly Christian towns like Telkayf, to which virtually no Christians had returned for fear of local Muslim fundamentalists. At the same time, the agencies would boast of the reconstruction of schools, which took "the form of one thin coat of painting on the exterior surface walls, with freshly stenciled UNICEF logos every 30 feet," but which were useless and full of rubble on the inside (87). Liberation of the Nineveh Plain had been completed by the Kurdish *peshmerga* and the Iraqi *hashd al-shaabi* (popular militias); many in the latter had ties to the Iranian government. One group, the 30th Shabak brigade (the Shabak are a minority ethnoreligious sect), took over the town of Bartella and made it an unwelcoming space for Christians (105).

Elsewhere, Christians managed to re-establish their communities in towns such as Teleskof, with help from the churches, but their numbers were in steep decline. The town of Baghdade (popularly known as Qaraqosh) was the largest Christian

city in the region prior to 2014; as of the book's publication a Christian militia provides security to the town, but only about 26,000 of a prewar population around 50,000 have returned (136).

Rasche saves his greatest ire for what he calls a duplicitous and often incompetent US government response to the crisis. From the beginning, he finds that State Department representatives in northern Iraq were woefully unaware of what was going on in Ankawa a "mile and a half away from the US consulate and the UN compound" (58). Furthermore, State Department officials seemed bent on subverting US support for the churches' work in the region; one official even informed Rasche that financing extended by an act of Congress with bipartisan support was "unconstitutional" (68). When Christian and Yazidi groups cooperated to submit two proposed projects to USAID in April 2018, both submissions were rejected, and "the only groups to have received approval notices were three large, US-based professional aid organizations, all of them well-established within the existing USAID/UN funding pipeline" (144). This happened despite Vice President Mike Pence's public promise to see funding reach the Christian minorities. Rasche goes on to wonder if the State Department deliberately sought to undermine the Trump administration's commitment based on its own institutional priorities or just defaulted to an easy strategy that it knew well.

International actors' determination to avoid supporting the minority religious communities made it virtually impossible for Christians to receive help, since "the only meaningful help that they had received throughout the displacement came from the Church" (156). Rasche lauds these efforts but states clearly that they would be insufficient without external support from the Iraqi government and the international community.

The book highlights the limitations of official efforts to address minority religious populations under threat. Despite an international campaign to eliminate the Islamic State and to publicize the plight of Iraqi Christians, their extinction seems inevitable given the long-term incentives of the Kurdish and Iraqi authorities.

The book could have benefited from a more clearly chronological structure linking one chapter to the next. It could also have provided a bird's-eye view of the various Christian towns that were evacuated and restored after the conflict with the Islamic State so as to orient the reader. Nevertheless, it supplies invaluable eyewitness information to practitioners and scholars alike, who will read it as a cautionary tale and, hopefully, as a call to action.

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