

Book reviews

Boyd-MacMillan, Ronald: Faith that endures. The essential guide to the persecuted church. Lancaster: Sovereign World/ Grand Rapids: Revell, 2006, 364 p., UK-ISBN 1 85240 449 3, US-ISBN 978-0-8007-3119-9, Lb 11.99, US\$ 14.99.

This book holds true to its title: It is indeed an essential guide to the persecuted church and it facilitates an encounter with the persecuted believers. The author has been visiting and reporting on persecuted Christians for more than 25 years. His degrees in political science and theology as well as his training as a journalist enable him to process his rich experience and thorough research, turning it into the currently best and most comprehensive handbook on facts, background and complexity of persecution of Christians today. In his quest he is guided by five questions:

1. What does contemporary persecution look like? Those who give their lives for their faith form only the tip of the iceberg. They are being killed by people who want to save their god, criminal syndicate or honour by doing so. The histories of martyrs are dramatic – but for each of them there are thousands of Christians who are suffering alive. Using India as an example the author explains a recurring pattern: A power vacuum is exploited by extremists to move into centres of power. Lies are spread and repeated until they are believed. Mobs are incited to spread chaos in order to cower the opposition. Every single act of persecution usually has multiple causes: Ideology, government, family, culture, church (!), corrupt individuals, and 'over-boldness' of Christians.

2. What is persecution? From a legal perspective five essential rights constitute religious liberty today: The right to believe your religion, to practice, spread, or change it, and to pass it on to one's children or dependants. Taking into account all cases where any of these rights are denied, more than a third of the world's Christians are persecuted. If one wishes to reserve the word persecution for 'gross violations', there are still 200-250 million Christians exposed to it. However a legal definition is inadequate to fully grasp the spiritual reality, which necessitates an encompassing theological definition: Persecution of Christians is “any hostility, experienced from the world, as a result of one's identification with Christ. This can include hostile feelings, attitudes, words, and actions.”

3. Where is the persecuted church? The four global engines of persecution today are religious nationalism, Islamic extremism, totalitarian insecurity, and secular intolerance. Religious nationalism exists where a particular territory or culture is staked out exclusively in religious terms. Christians are degraded to second-class citizens facing daily discrimination,

or worse, they may have to flee. Islamic extremism has different dynamics, as it has a pan-national vision, which strives to incorporate the whole world into Islam. In a totalitarian state, political leaders are trying to control every aspect of life. Where Christians refuse to be dominated, they are seen as a threat and persecuted. Secular intolerance is a growing and so far underestimated source of persecution, which tries to limit evangelistic religions in the name of tolerance. The author gives the readers a global survey in this most extensive section of the book, differentiating by region and picking in each region two 'countries to watch' concerning the future development of religious freedom. These are: Columbia, Mexico, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Eritrea, China, Sri Lanka, France and the USA. This is complemented by inserted case studies on individuals.

4. How do we help the persecuted? According to Boyd-MacMillan, helping the persecuted is messy, controversial, and confusing. Without the proper care more harm than good might be done. He criticises overheated publicity and exaggeration, polarising disputes on tactics, parroting of government propaganda by foreign visitors, and a concentration on the urgent rather than the strategic. He then assesses seven methods of intervention and when these are best suited. Prayer and intercession are always in order and the first help desired by the persecuted. It should be focussed on the establishment of the kingdom of God. Publishing the truth about the persecuted church in general is usually always called for, to speak out on behalf of persecuted individuals requires great sensitivity. Private representation, particularly by influential individuals, usually happens quietly, while letters of encouragement to prisoners and letters of protest to persecutors also make a difference. The use of legal intervention provides ammunition for publicity, has an embarrassing effect for the persecutors, and empowers Christians to stand up for their rights. Illegal intervention, such as smuggling bibles or sneaking endangered people out of a country are necessary when no legal options exist to serve the church. Political pressure from politician to politician or from state to state, while at times having an effect, according to the author, tends to be most overestimated in its value by Christians. Positive engagement by (foreign) Christians in contexts of persecution can eventually result in better treatment for the persecuted but is fraught with pitfalls.

Boyd-MacMillan is very differentiated in his assessment and emphasises that all methods of intervention have their place and supplement each other. The key factor that binds them together in effectiveness is a trustworthy relationship with the persecuted church itself. Further, the author is assisting willing donors with criteria to choose agencies worth supporting: Do they give an opportunity to encounter the persecuted? Do

they make prayer an absolute priority? Do they have sound accountability structures? Is there a willingness to work in coalitions? Are long-term causes of persecution addressed? Is there an awareness of the complexity and the challenges? Do they have a good track record? Do they get into (enough) trouble and how do they behave when criticised?

5. What can we learn from the persecuted? An important lesson for the author is that more strongly persecuted Christians have something to give to the body of Christ. Christians with a greater degree of freedom are challenged by three questions: Am I walking the way of the cross? Am I in enough trouble for Jesus? Is my God big enough?

Ronald Boyd-MacMillan is writer-at-large for Open Doors, co-founded News Network International in 1987 and worked as its Asia bureau chief until 1991 and later became the Asia bureau chief for Compass Direct (1996-2002). His book is the best and most comprehensive popular treatise on the issues surrounding religious freedom and persecution of Christians from an evangelical perspective.

Dr Christof Sauer, Cape Town, South Africa

Johnson, Thomas K: Human Rights - A Christian Primer. (The WEA Global Issues Series 1). Bonn: Culture and Science Publishing, 2008, 112 p., ISBN 978-3-938116-61-6, € 12,00.

This small book is the first in a series of books in the recently started WEA Global Issues series. Johnson's text is a good start. It is, as the title suggests, a primer on a Christian view of human rights. This is a study close to my own heart, as an activist and theologian working with and on behalf of persecuted Christians around the world. When I began my own study on the subject several years ago, I found very little written on the subject, especially from an evangelical perspective. This scarcity of resources has been remedied to some degree in recent years, but Johnson's book fills a particular niche of being a primer or an introduction, while also dealing with the subject really quite satisfactorily.

Rightly grounding the basis of human rights on the fact that all humans are created in the image of God, Johnson examines quite effectively what exactly rights are and what they are not. This is an important study in a day when preferences are often considered to be 'rights' in popular culture. His chapter on 'Rights, Religions, and Ideologies' was, I believe, the strongest part of the study. He carefully notes how only a Christian world view of humanity (both fallen and created in the divine image) provides an adequate basis for defending the dignity of human life. What I think would strengthen this primer even more, however, would be further development on the implications of being created in the image of the

Triune God for human rights. This is something that I have studied at length in my research and believe is an aspect of the study on human rights that is often lacking in other studies.

All in all, I would say that this is the best study on the subject that I have yet read and highly recommend it, especially to university or college students.

Glenn M Penner; Mississauga, Ontario, Canada

Manji, Irshad: The trouble with Islam - A wake-up call for honesty and change. Edinburgh/London 2004/2005, 254 p., \$ 22,95.

An amazing book! It starts with an open letter to Muslims and Irshad Manji's honest confession about her struggles with Islam. In spite of calling herself a Muslim *refusenik* (www.muslim-refusenik.com) she does not desire to leave Islam; but neither is she prepared to close her eyes to the problems and troubles with Islam. Dr. Manji's doctorate is in sociology. She is a well-known TV journalist in Canada, a feminist and an openly confessed lesbian. Her father is Indian, her mother Egyptian. She was born in Uganda, but her family was expelled by the Ugandan dictator Idi Amin.

She says she studied the Qur'an and Muslim beliefs for the last 20 years and is convinced that Islam has to change if it wants to receive a hearing from the younger generation. Her basic proposition is that Islam has to return to the concept of *ijtihad*, to independent and honest thinking, away from rigid dogmatism, away from its obsession to glorify the days of Muhammad.

She describes her long pilgrimage in studying Islam, reading far and wide, discussing issues with her Muslim, Christian and Jewish friends, asking provocative questions, travelling to Arab countries and to Israel, unwilling to accept pet answers or to be satisfied with taboos and traditions. Her aim is to reform and modernise Islam. Her campaign *Operation Ijtihad* is her attempt to achieve this goal. Her book is a call to intellectual honesty, openness and tolerance.

She clearly and without mincing words describes the issues she feels need to be tackled by the Muslim community and those which need to be changed: the oppression and discrimination of women, the rejection of independent, open-minded thinking, the misguided desire to live in the same way as Muhammad, the rejection of the universal human rights, the discrimination of religious minorities in Muslim countries, anti-Semitism and the hatred of Israel which poisons every new generation from early childhood onwards, *jihad* and anti-western hatred. Her aim in this all is to stimulate discussion among the silent majority. She also believes that an essential part of her campaign is to free Muslim women from their financial

dependency in which Dr. Manji sees the conceptual and institutionalised reason for the oppression and discrimination of Muslim women.

The book makes exciting reading. Dr. Manji's conclusions are based on wide reading and well researched facts. Quoted websites and literature are helpful. She invites discussion. Her assessment and conclusions seem honest and fair. I have not found a single typing error in the book – certainly a sign of thoroughness.

The book has been published in almost 30 countries and languages. Some translations are available on Irshad Manji's website free of charge (www.irshadmanji.com). Her website also provides information on all sources for the facts she quotes and lists also positive and negative letters to her and *fatwas* against her.

At the end one wonders how long she will be able to survive all threats on her life and the fatwas against her. The Canadian police and Salman Rushdie advised her to take certain precautions – but how effective will they be in the case of someone who is dead serious in killing her in order to protect the honour of Islam and Muhammad?

Dr Dietrich Kuhl, Essen, Germany

Tieszen, Charles L: Re-Examining Religious Persecution: Constructing a Theological Framework for Understanding Persecution. (Religious Freedom Series 1). Johannesburg: AcadSA Publishing. 2008, 92 p., ISBN 1995-011X, R 90.

This book attempts to redefine the religious persecution of Christians by thoroughly examining it within a theological framework. First Tieszen deals with a number of misconceptions that confuse the issue, such as narrowing it to certain periods in history or geographical regions. He then develops definitions on three levels, starting with persecution in general and moving to religious persecution from a sociological perspective. He rightly notes that socio-political definitions, while having the benefit of being quantifiable, are too narrow to include the full reality that all followers of Jesus must expect to be persecuted. Tieszen therefore insists on the necessity of a theological definition of the religious persecution of Christians, which must be broad enough to also include mild levels of hostility and harm that are not necessarily infringements of human rights. This he develops in a lot of detail, finally boiling it down to the brief definition: "Any unjust action of varying levels of hostility perpetrated primarily on the basis of religion and directed at Christians, resulting in varying levels of harm as it is considered from the victim's perspective."

In a further chapter Tieszen discusses theological questions, such as why persecution occurs, and what the sources and reasons of persecution are. He highlights that persecution is allowed and appointed by God as a part of

God's plan. "Persecution is ultimately God's direction in a given context" (p. 78) though Satan is the source of persecution. Finally Tieszen deals with four potential responses to persecution: enduring it; avoiding it; resisting it; and showing solidarity with the persecuted. Different responses might be called for in different situations.

I consider this book an informative and thought provoking contribution that enriches the thinking about persecution. It helps Christians to understand the basic meaning of religious persecution as well as to reflect theologically on the different contexts. I recommend it to all libraries of theological institutions and mission agencies. It is a useful guideline, especially for Christian ministers who are looking for appropriate answers in responding to the religious persecution of other Christians, and also to develop a proper response to persecution in a given context.

Dr Byeong Hei Jun, Cape Town, South Africa

Schirmacher, Thomas: May a Christian Go to Court and other Essays on Persecution vs. Religious Freedom. (The WEA Global Issues Series 3). Bonn: Culture and Science Publ. 2008, 112 p., ISBN 978-3-938116-63-0, € 12,00.

The most important essay in this collection in my opinion is the Evangelical contribution to a code of Ethics for Christian witness, which is pursued together with the Christian world community, particularly the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. Other important pieces include an argument why involvement in the cause of religious freedom should be a central political issue for everybody, a dictionary article on persecution and mission, and reflections on the relationship between human rights and Christian faith. This is complemented by some wider ethical considerations, debating the Christian misconception that a Christian may not go to court, advising how to put rumours within the church to rest, and arguing for the need of a social ethic, and some press releases pertaining to Turkey. All of this has been previously published elsewhere either in English or in German, but it is useful to have it all in one volume.

Dr Christof Sauer, Cape Town, South Africa

Schirmacher, Thomas: Christenverfolgung heute - Die vergessenen Märtyrer. Holzgerlingen: SCM Hänssler 2008, 96 p., ISBN 978-3-7751-4908-2, € 6,95.

This is a short but highly knowledgeable introductory volume into the topic of the persecution of Christians today. It gives the basic facts, discusses controversial issues and offers practical suggestions for churches, individuals and politicians, and a good list of information sources. A number of answers are given to the question why Christians and Evangelicals in particular face so much persecution. The author discusses the right to change one's religion, unethical means of conversion, the right

to publicly expressing one's opinion which includes the right to peaceful mission activity. He also offers a theological interpretation of persecution in the light of the Bible, discussing the role of the martyrs, the effects of persecution, persecution effected by Christians on others, and the encouragement given by scripture. Schirmacher, who is Director of the IIRF and Speaker of the WEA for Human Rights, has succeeded in presenting a concise and very useful introduction to the topic in German.

Dr Christof Sauer, Cape Town, South Africa

Cherian, M Thomas: Hindutva agenda and minority rights - A Christian response. Study of Hindu fundamentalism and its impact on secularism in India from 1947-1997. (Studies in the Gospel Interface with Indian Contexts, 8). Bangalore: Centre for Contemporary Christianity 2007, 359 p., Pb US\$25, Hb US\$30 (International distribution: help@mergingcurrents.com).

In the fifty years after independence, instead of a growth in communal harmony and national integration throughout India, there developed a tendency to factionalize and politicize religious identities and to exploit spirituality to divisive ends. Whereas the constitution promised liberty for all to practice and propagate their faiths, the insistence to demand India to become Hindu Rashtra was intensified by forces which were negative towards the pluralism that existed in the country. The concept of 'secular democracy' was not properly understood and its outworking suffered much hindrances. Ideological confusions were flaunted by forces that steadily developed superstructures to the extent of capturing political power and governance at the State and Central levels.

Christian Mission continued to work in independent India with native mission agencies taking their role to spread its witness all across the land, both in the urban and the predominantly rural, interior and hill settings. Numerous indigenous mission societies were born at the initiative of charismatic individuals and groups. Their missionaries went as Servants of the Cross and established their churches and developed people. The public was happy with the medical, educational and relief activities of Christian missions. Though many benefited from these service ventures of Christian community, only few resolved to follow Jesus Christ and to join the church community. It was not a considerable number. Yet even the small number of conversions caused anxiety to the majority community. Hence, the earlier claim of tolerance was superseded by a militant agitation and anguish as leadership and structures emerged with a blind following by unlearned and misguided common folk. Even well placed political and religious leaders used this in blind fury. While the leadership in the nation tried to promote secular democracy, the militant hindutva brigade committed itself to the promotion of hindu rashtra. This meant a disowning of the non-hindus; and

this worked its way in many situations through the decades. The Muslims were targeted from the time of partition. Later the Sikhs were the attacked and hunted community. The third minority group under surveillance is the Christian community. It is of great urgency that the Christian community should understand the developments and the roots and ramifications of the attacks on them, in order to be prepared for both self defence as well as healing ministry.

Some popular writings have come about in response to the attacks. But clear and systematic study of an academic nature are few and insufficient. CV Mathew's book *The Saffron Mission* deals with the Hindutva movement and its history and concepts. We need further help. Hence, M Thomas Cherian has undertaken to study this area for his doctoral research with the South Asia Theological Research Institute (SATHRI) of the Senate of Serampore College.

M Thomas Cherian studies the way the hindutva agitation rose and formalized itself into religious and political structures. He interprets what secularism could have meant and indicates how fundamentalist mindset took predominance and grew to hurt peaceful co-existence. In the very introduction, he says:

Independent India unlike earlier, has witnessed an unprecedented growth of religious fundamentalism. ...religious violence and communal riots are frequent occurrences in modern India. Religiously-oriented political parties have tended to capture power in the states and at the centre, to subdue minorities, and even to attack the worship places of the minority communities. (p.1)

Cherian raises the question: "Why do these things happen in a secular democratic country like India...?" and goes on to study the roots of this trend.

Not a day goes by without a report from some part or the other in the nation of attacks on Christian pastors, nuns, institutions and churches. Religious persecution is rampant and there is fear in the minds of those working in pioneer settings. It is not confined to remote rural sectors but are often reported from urban cities as well. What started out in the less Christian Northern States as persecution of Christians has steadily become common all over the nation, including Kerala where the Christian number is high. How should Christians respond to these attacks? How should they safeguard themselves and their interest? How should they share the goodnews of God's love in Christ to their Hindu and other neighbours?

Cherian investigates the birth, growth and affect of the fundamentalist and militant trend in the Hindutva movement and attempts to propose how the church ought to respond to it. 'Minority Rights' is at the heart of the investigation of Cherian. He defines the minority and the rationale for their rights

as citizens in a secular democracy, wherein freedom of religion is a constitutional privilege of every citizen. Citing Articles 25 and 26 he establishes the fact that the right to change of faith is a fundamental right of a citizen.

Cherian suggests that “Public theology emerging through an inter-community dialogue” should be “taken as a viable model of theological response of the church in India towards the growing religious, especially Hindu, fundamentalism in India” (p.6). Such public theology to him “emerges from discourse, debate and dialogue within the common public, and it is from the every day life of the public of the civil society. In this debate and dialogue, it is not the religious leaders alone coming together to discuss the matters but the common public engaged in various streams of life from the common working class to the upper class people brought together in discussion of matters related in the every day life” (pp.307-308). Hence, the call of Cherian is to the total church – the clergy and the laity together to develop that sort of an interaction which will develop a public theology which will enable Christian mission to relate with the fundamentalist trends of the other religious communities and to be able to impact them with that goodnews that intends to love and transform all humanity in the new man Jesus Christ.

He concludes saying:

The Church in India, in the context of violation of the minority rights can take the lead in bringing together various communities of people for a dialogue and discussion on the disturbing questions of life. The basic aim of this discussion is to find ways to live together harmoniously without religious violence and the violation of the rights of the religious minorities. *These inter-community dialogue and discussions can lead to the formulation of a public theology that is a theology emerging from, for and by the civil people, the common people.* (pp.310-311)

This study clarifies to us the meaning of a secular state, secularism, constitutional democracy and fundamental rights and helps us to develop perspectives on how we ought to understand our role in the public sphere as those who shall enable the political process to safeguard the rights of the minorities and protect a continued secular state, where all religions shall enjoy freedom of exercise and expression. This is a timely study and a positive input to our understanding of mission in plural settings.

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