

Book reviews

Featured topic: Freedom to believe for Muslims who leave Islam

There are increasing numbers of Muslims leaving Islam. And there have always been laws against and penalties for “apostasy” in Islam, up to the death penalty, applied in varying degrees of harshness in history by the respective state, families or society, in order to keep people from leaving Islam. Some Muslims are leaving Islam because they have discovered Christ. Usually, once they confess their new found faith openly and witness about it, they encounter the severest repression.

Brother Andrew & Al Janssen: Secret believers. What happens when Muslims turn to Christ? Grand Rapids: Revell 2007, 272 p., hardcover, ISBN 9780800718749, US\$19.99; Revell 2008, 265 p., paperback, ISBN 9780800732646, US\$ 14.99; London: Hodder & Stoughton 2008, 288 p., hardcover, ISBN 9780340909324, £7.99; Website related to the book: www.secretbelievers.org

In order not to jeopardize anyone, the authors have constructed a narrative from true content, that reads like a fast-paced well written novel. Some of the characters are Butros, a Christian who seeks to assist new believers in the Muslim world, Ahmed, a young Muslim terrified by nightmares until he is introduced to Isa (Jesus), Mustafa, a former leader in a fundamentalist Muslim movement that persecuted Christians, Salima, a privileged young Muslim woman who is held captive by her family when they find a Bible in her possession. The story reveals the dynamics of spiritual search, the intricacies of oppression, freedom found through courageous faith and the tug of war between love and hate, in a moving way, more than a scholarly account could.

The last 33 pages under the heading “How shall we respond?” pose four challenges to Christians: (1) Do we see Muslims as enemies? Or are we seeking to win them to Christ? (2) Are we going to seek revenge when we are attacked? Should we not offer forgiveness instead? (3) What would happen if we accepted the challenge of Islam by striving as Christians to imitate Christ? (4) Are we really convinced that we are engaged in a spiritual war? If so, shouldn't we commit to a life of prayer? In this war are we willing to

do anything, even lay down our lives, if necessary, to advance the kingdom of God?

This is a highly recommendable book on a popular level written from a truly spiritual Christian attitude that anyone will understand. It has been translated into various languages.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (ed.): No place to call home. Experiences of apostates from Islam. Failures of the International Community. New Malden, Surrey: CSW 2008, 116 p., Also available online: <http://tinyurl.com/CSW-Apostasy> [29 April 2008; 1.03MB PDF].

This report explores the human rights abuses suffered by people who left Islam. Apostates are subject to gross and wide-ranging human rights abuses including extra judicial killings by state-related agents or mobs; honour killings by family members; detention, imprisonment, torture, physical and psychological intimidation by security forces; the denial of access to judicial services and social services; the denial of equal employment or education opportunities; social pressure resulting in loss of housing and employment; and day-to-day discrimination and ostracism in education, finance and social activities.

The study explores the right to choose a religion, apostasy in Islamic theology and shari'a law, apostasy laws today, state responses to apostasy, social reactions to apostasy and life as Muslim-background Christian. Extensive appendices with cases, applicable secular and Islamic human rights documents, relevant provisions in constitutions, and a full listing of Qur'anic verses on religious freedom make valuable supplements.

This solidly researched and well documented report should not be underestimated. The 116 pages in small print on A4 size pages would make a regular book three times that volume.

Abdullah Saeed & Hassan Saeed: Freedom of religion, apostasy and Islam. Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate 2004, 227 p., ISBN 9780754630821, paperback £17.99.

This book is an example of Muslims discussing arguments for absolute freedom of religion and for discarding the punishment of apostasy. The authors are a professor of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Melbourne, Australia and the attorney general of the Maldives, respectively. They want to contribute to the thinking that

freedom of religion is a fundamental principle of Islam and that the death penalty for apostasy violates this principle. The discussion is a global one, while a third of the book is concerned with a case study on the multi-religious Muslim majority country Malaysia.

In this country another book by the former chief justice of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan from 1972 has been republished: **Sheik Abdur Rahman, Punishment of apostasy in Islam**. Revised edition. Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press, 2007, 184 p., ISBN 9789839541496, US\$ 12.00.

Also watch out for a title to appear in November / December 2009: **Patrick Sookhdeo: Freedom to believe - challenging Islam's apostasy law**. London: Isaac Publishing 2009, US\$ 14.99, £ 8.99.

Jonathan Carswell & Joanna Wright: Married to a Martyr. The authorised biography of a widow in Turkey. Milton Keynes: Authentic Media 2008, ISBN 9781850787853, £ 8.99.

The murder of three Christians in Malatya, Turkey on 18 April 2007 on the premises of a small Christian publishing house is still under investigation before the courts. It successively emerges, that the murderers seem only to have been the puppets of higher placed people who see Christian witness and publishing as a threat to Turkish nationalism. This book tells the story of one of those murdered, Tilman Geske from Germany, from the perspective of his wife Susanne as written up by two young Christian writers from Northern Ireland.

Another book on one of the Turkish Christians murdered, Necati Aydin, so far has only appeared in German. It is written by his German brother-in-law, who was also to be killed, and covers Aydin's conversion, the situation of the church and converts in Turkey, social hostility and governmental discrimination and arrests: **Wolfgang Häde: Mein Schwager – ein Märtyrer. Die Geschichte des türkischen Christen Necati Aydin**. Schwarzenfeld, Germany: Neufeld Verlag, 2009, 109 p., € 9.90.

Marshall, Paul A (ed.): Religious freedom in the world. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield 2007, 499 p., ISBN 9780742562127, US\$ 78.89, Published in cooperation with the Center for Religious Freedom at the Hudson Institute.

In 2000 Marshall, then still at Freedom House, published 75 country profiles as *Religious Freedom in the World* from a religious freedom

and human rights perspective. The 2008 version of this massive global survey with the team of the Center for Religious Freedom now at the Hudson Institute, provides 101 country profiles, thereby covering 95% of the world's population. The range of questions for country experts has been expanded, adding more questions on the economic dimensions such as job discrimination. For a complementary check of the situation with a different methodology additional questionnaires developed by Brian Grim have been used. The approach of the compendium represents real scholarly progress. Different from the earlier books is the focus on religious freedom in general instead of solely on the persecution of Christians in particular. The country profiles were written by a whole team of authors and further processed in a cooperative manner. They follow clear definitions of the issues, and the authors operated with a published set of criteria for a coherent narrative and a quite comprehensive set of 112 questions on the infringements of religious freedom rights.

This reference work has set a standard for country profiles which should be taken as a benchmark. Whether the criteria are comprehensive enough in all cases for profiling the persecution of Christians from a Christian perspective, or whether a Christian theological angle needs to be added, has to be assessed. As there are for example cases which Christians consider as persecution from a theological perspective, which are not infringements of religious freedom according to international human rights standards, it is likely that further work on a comprehensive set of descriptors of persecution from a Christian theological perspective is needed.

The country profiles unfortunately do not provide any references or bibliography, which has already been used as a cheap excuse against the validity of the contents by representatives of a country that scores badly. However, when one scrutinizes other reports available on the internet, the country profiles seem very reasonably compiled.

The first 54 pages of the book contain a number of analytical summaries by Marshall and others on the range of religious freedom, "secular and religious, church and state", religious freedom and national security, religious freedom and socio-economic wellbeing, economics and religions, as well as regional surveys on the Middle East, Europe, the Balkans and Southeastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union. This is a very valuable addition, as some of this

material will outlive the country profiles which will soon become dated.

This commendable reference work is the best on its topic, currently the most up to date and a must for any reference library.

Dr Christof Sauer, Cape Town, South Africa

Recent books of interest and some classics

Lori G Beaman: *Defining harm: religious freedom and the limits of the law*. (Law and society series). UBC Press 2008, 185 p., ISBN 9780774814294.

Stephen B Bevans, Jeffrey Gros: *Evangelization and Religious Freedom: Ad Gentes, Dignitatis Humanae*. Rediscovering Vatican II. Paulist Press 2008, 259 p., ISBN 9780809142026.

Charlene Burns: *More Moral Than God: Taking Responsibility for Religious Violence*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2008, 147 p., ISBN 9780742558687.

Keith E Eitel (ed.): *Missions in contexts of violence*. (Evangelical Missiological Society Series, 15) Pasadena: William Carey Library 2008, 415 p., US\$ 14.99, ISBN978-0-87808-389-3.

Tibebe Eshete: *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia: Resistance and Resilience*. Baylor University Press, 2009, 480 p., ISBN 9781602580022.

Paul Estabrooks & Jim Cunningham: *Standing strong through the storm*. Santa Ana, CA: Open Doors 2004, 386 p. (www.od.org) – A study guide for Christians to understand and withstand persecution.

Mike Falkenstine: *The Chinese Puzzle*. Xulon Press 2008, 152 p., ISBN 9781606471432. - About the church in China by China Resource Center.

Rosalind I J Hackett: *Proselytization Revisited: Rights Talk, Free Markets and Culture Wars*. Equinox 2008, 480 p., ISBN 9781845532277.

Jeffrey Haynes: *Routledge handbook of religion and politics*. Taylor & Francis, 2008, 448 p., ISBN 9780415414555.

- Craig Hovey: *To Share in the Body*. Brazos Press, 2008, 157 p., ISBN 9781587432170. - Theological reflection on martyrdom in the Gospel of Mark.
- Harold D Hunter & Cecil M Robeck, Jr (eds.): *The suffering body. Responding to the persecution of Christians*. Milton Keynes, UK/ Waynesborough, USA: Paternoster 2006, 228 p., ISBN1-84227-378-7.
- Mike Kim: *Escaping North Korea: defiance and hope in the world's most repressive country*. Rowman & Littlefield 2008, ISBN 0742556204.
- Paul Marshall (ed.): *Radical Islam's Rules: The Worldwide Spread of Extreme Shari'a Law*. Lanham (MD): Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.
- Timothy M. Monsma: *Hope for the southern world. Impacting societal problems in the non-western world*. Loveland, CO: CCW Books 2006, 135 p., US\$ 12.95, ISBN 1-4243-1162-4. - Focuses on the societal background of persecution.
- Jacob Neusner, Bruce Chilton (eds.): *Religious Tolerance in World Religions*. 2nd ed. Templeton Foundation Press, 2008, 368 p., ISBN 9781599471365.
- Glenn M Penner: *In the shadow of the Cross: A biblical theology of persecution and discipleship*. Bartlesville, USA: Living Sacrifice Books 2004, 315 p., ISBN 0-88264-346-0.
- Howard Taylor: *Human Rights: Its Culture and Moral Confusion*. Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2004.
- Stephen Russell: *Overcoming Evil God's Way: The Biblical and Historical Case for Nonresistance*. Faith Builders Publishing, 2008, 320 p., ISBN 9780981656908
- Charles Selengut: *Sacred fury: understanding religious violence*. 2nd edition. Rowman & Littlefield 2008, 237 p., ISBN 9780742560840.