

## Book Reviews

### **Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A study in the development of reformed social thought**

David VanDrunen

*Grand Rapids/ Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 2010, 466 p., ISBN 978-0802864437, US\$ 35.*

If, as thoughtful and responsible Christians, we want to promote freedom of religion on the global level, obviously we have rejected theocratic ways of thinking, but we have not opted to withdraw from the world into holy communities. We assume there is a standard of civilized and humane life (including freedom of religion for all) which we want to promote that is also mostly compatible with the way of life we teach within Christian churches. But how are we to explain this theologically? A very worthy proposal for theological categories is the combination of natural moral law with two kingdoms doctrine. VanDrunen offers a superb historical study of how these themes have been taught in the Reformed and Presbyterian traditions in Europe and North America.

Natural law doctrine claimed, “God had inscribed his moral law on the heart of every person, such that through the testimony of conscience all human beings have knowledge of their basic moral obligations and, in particular, have a universally accessible standard for the development of civil law.” Two kingdoms doctrine taught “God rules the church (the spiritual kingdom) as redeemer in Jesus Christ and rules the state and all other social institutions (the civil kingdom) as creator and sustainer, and thus these two kingdoms have significantly different ends, functions, and modes of operations” (p. 1). Though the cultural context of Christendom hampered the implementation of these doctrines during the Reformation, and though some 20th century writers such as Karl Barth, Herman Dooyeweerd, and N. T. Wright did not properly appropriate these doctrines, VanDrunen presents a powerful case for the relevance and importance of these traditional Protestant ethical doctrines for Christians in a Post-Constantinian, Post-Christendom world. Precisely these moral doctrines are an important reason why evangelicals in previous centuries promoted freedom of religion (e.g., 18th century Virginia Presbyterians) while also teaching that all people and all civic institutions are morally accountable to God. It is the best book on the history of Protestant social ethics I have read.

Following VanDrunen, believers have two sets of duties: in God’s spiritual kingdom we must proclaim the gospel and build up the church; in God’s civil kingdom

we should promote justice without thinking our efforts for justice replace gospel preaching.

*Prof. Dr. Thomas K. Johnson, Prague, Czech Republic, is author of Human Rights: A Christian Primer (World Evangelical Alliance, 2008), available as a free download at [www.bucer.eu/international](http://www.bucer.eu/international).*

## **God is Red: The secret story of how Christianity survived and flourished in communist China**

Liao Yiwu, Wenguang Huang (tr.)

*New York: HarperOne, 2011, 231 p., ISBN 978-0062078469, US\$ 25.95.*

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Ever since the famous Jewish historian Josephus' works were discovered, the genre of storytelling has been a fascinating way to document history. In a sense, the latest work of Chinese dissident and writer Mr. Liao Yiwu – a compilation of individual stories of religious persecution in the past five decades under Communist rule – does for Christians what Josephus did for the Jews.

Like Josephus, Yiwu wrote down the stories of individuals whom he interviewed face to face. Most of his subjects were introduced to him by a former medical professor who became a “barefoot doctor” in the remote areas of Southwest China's Yunnan province after being fired from his medical school job for holding unapproved private Bible study meetings in his own home. I am blessed to know this “barefoot doctor,” surnamed Sun, who is also known as “Jesus Doctor” because of the extraordinary sacrifice he has made of his medical career and his remarkable medical skills to take care of “the poorest of the poor” in those most remote areas who would otherwise have died.

Most of Yiwu's stories of persecution in this book are previously unknown or little known to the world outside China., However, the father of one of the subjects is the son of Pastor Wang Zhiming, the sole Chinese among the ten most courageous martyrs of 20th century selected by the Anglican Church. Pastor Zhiming was executed by China's Communist leaders in front of tens of thousands of people in 1973 for his “stubborn” refusal to bow to the deified Chairman Mao and his unwavering loyalty to his Lord Jesus Christ. But today, his statute stands on top of the gate to Westminster Abbey in London. Blessed be the faithful descendants of Pastor Zhiming. Although the persecution details in *God is Red* can be somewhat heavy going, readers of this book will definitely find themselves greatly encouraged and edified if they share the same faith. For decades, the Chinese government has been spreading the propaganda that persecution against Christians had completely ceased, but

these newly revealed stories about events that have happened even in recent years will serve as a balance to the scenario of more Christians freely attending church on any given Sunday than in all of Europe together.

As a former Chinese house church pastor imprisoned for my beliefs and now an advocate for religious freedom, I wholeheartedly recommend this book to all Christians, to China scholars concerned about religion and persecution and to religious freedom fighters everywhere. It is not only an up-to-date account of a painful aspect of Christianity in China today, it is also good spiritual food for believers. I appreciated the author's frank assessment of his concern about the different "impure" motivations and the genuineness of new converts today in China's rapidly secularized major urban centers. I see those possibly insincere conversions as standing in stark contrast to the author's own pursuit of a most-pure faith in Christ. The author, according to his own admission is not (yet) a Christian. This makes this book the more remarkable.

*Bob Fu, China Aid Association, Midland, Texas, USA*

## **Interreligiöse Verständigung zu Glaubensverbreitung und Religionswechsel**

Christoph Elias (ed.)

*Hamburg: EB-Verlag, 2010, 397 p., ISBN 978-3936912913, € 23.00.*

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The book whose title translates as "Interreligious understanding of the spreading of religion and conversion" contains a collection of contributions by different authors at the 6th International Rudolf-Otto-Symposium, organized by the Department of Protestant Theology of the University of Marburg, Germany. At this university an interdisciplinary bachelor course in "Religious Mediation" has been installed.

The problems of inter-religious understanding concerned here are presented in 9 chapters, of which the first three contain a sort of theoretical frame, chapters 4 to 7 deal with different aspects of the spreading of faith and of changing religion, and the last two try to show some possible solutions.

Chapter 1 deals with some basic questions for a theological systematisation on the spreading of faith and change of religion, seen from the point of view of all religions, with contributions by Edith Franke on the influence of social surroundings, by Volkhard Krech with a typology of forms of inter-religious contacts, and by Peter Antes on the enhancing of profiles of faith under the conditions of inter-religious competition.

In chapter 2 there follow some studies on specifically Christian theories on the spreading of faith and change of religion. Andreas Feldtkeller analyses the core aspect of relationships between the exclusivity claim of single religions and religious freedom. Hans-Martin Barth, Michael Sievernich, Richard F. Waldorp and Dieter Becker relate to other aspects of this problem.

The third and last part of this theoretical introduction deals with the self-consciousness of other religions, the Jews (Walter Homolka and Monica Bunk), Islam (Servet Armagan), Hinduism (Peter Schalk and Martin Mittwede), Buddhism (Shin Fujieda), Lamaism (Adelheid Hermann-Pfandt) and the Bahá'í (Peter Amsler)

The central part (chapter 4 to 8) contains a number of contributions on the specific themes of the book. Freedom of religion is the theme of chapter 4. Edmund Weber contributes the general thesis that in the modern time of globalisation religious collectivism has lost its force and individual freedom of religion is a historic necessity. The individual choice between religions is the task and duty of every person. The affirmation of diverse positions can lead to a recognition of common interests between religions, but can also lead to an increase of existing differences. Ursula Spuler-Stegemann explains the religious aspects of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, insisting that it contains also a negative religious freedom, the right not to have a religion. Ömar Öszoy and Katja Triplett contribute two regional surveys on Islam in Japan.

On the interreligious theme "spreading of faith", meaning the problems connected with mission, the book (in chapter 5) does not contain a general theoretical inquiry, but only a number of contributions on regional problems: Stefan Jäger on the Christian mission in Japan, Christian Troll S.J. on a Christian website with answers to questions by Muslims, Tharvad Kadesh on relations between Christians and Muslims in Egypt and Bhikku Pasadika on the spreading of faith in the former and later Indian Buddhism.

In a further chapter we find contributions concerning the danger that interaction between religions may lead to an indiscriminate mixing of religions (chapter 6). This is seen as a danger for religious individuality (Michael Utsch), or as an inevitable consequence (Martin Kraatz) or even as a positive development (Angela Standhartinger, Daniel Radtnakara Sadananda).

A further problem is addressed in chapter 7: that conversion to another religion may compromise the cultural identity of the persons involved. Klaus Otte addresses the problem in general, Wilhelm Richebächer contributes a regional study on Eastern Africa, Wolf D. Ahmed Arias relates the point of view of a convert to Islam, while Max Münzel deals with conversion in a polytheistic society.

The book concludes (chapter 8) by showing the alternatives in the relationships between religions: confrontation, competition or co-operation. The three contri-

butions (Adrian Loretan-Saladin, Peter Steinacker and Klaus Jork) conclude with passionate appeals for co-operation and dialogue. The last part (chapter 9) contains contributions to an ecumenical religious service which also concluded the symposium.

Without any doubt the mass of information in this book is overwhelming. But what may leave the reader sometimes dissatisfied, is a lack of concrete standing on controversial points. Nevertheless it is a publication which deserves to be studied.

*Georg Bransby-Windbolz, Cape Town, South Africa*

### **Vietnam's Christians: A century of growth in adversity**

Reg Reimer

*Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2011, 107 p., ISBN 978-0878083046, US\$ 12.99.*

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Vietnam's Christians fits squarely in the genre of western missionary accounts of a missionary planted Church in the Southern Hemisphere. In the first half of the book, Reimer takes the reader through the internal national political contradictions of modern Vietnam, its many cultures and religions, and the history of the Catholic and Protestant Churches. But all that is simply to prepare the reader for the amazing story of the growth of Vietnamese Christianity under severe persecution from 1975 to 2010. Unlike many missionary accounts this one recounts the experience of both the Catholic and the Protestant perseverance in faith.

This book is well researched. Indeed it cites over fifty sources in its just over one hundred pages. But what makes this book unique are the firsthand accounts and interviews with Vietnamese Christians who valiantly maintained and shared their faith in spite of the cost to family, property and health. There are insights and accounts here that cannot be found anywhere else.

The story of the persecution and growth of Christian faith in Vietnam has long gone under reported in the avalanche of literature on the history and politics of Vietnam by the secular media. This is also true of the story of Christian faith in China and Laos. In all three nations the Christian Church has grown much faster since the communists came to power than at any previous time.

Reimer is one of the best positioned westerners to tell the story of the Vietnamese Church under communist rule. His passion for Vietnam and his detailed understanding of the Vietnamese Church make this book valuable to scholars and others with an interest in religion in Vietnam. He served as a missionary in Vietnam during the American War in Vietnam, was deeply involved in the effort to assist Vietnamese refugees in SE Asia and Canada, and he has travelled in and out of Vietnam a

number of times over the last thirty years as he has advocated for religious freedom. On the one hand, his approach to advocacy avoids the extreme and sometimes undocumented criticisms of the most zealous human rights advocates. On the other hand, Reimer refuses to remain silent when facts on the ground warrant making public the persecution of Christian Vietnamese people for nothing more than practicing their religious faith.

This book would have been stronger had it focused only on the communist era and included a more deliberate discussion about the missiological lessons that can be drawn from the experience of Vietnamese Christians. Nevertheless, it is a valuable contribution to the understanding of Christianity in Vietnam. Next up, hopefully, will be a Vietnamese account of this era.

*Dr. Stephen Bailey, Professor of Intercultural Studies, Simpson University, Redding, CA, USA*

## **Freedom to believe: Challenging Islam's apostasy law**

Patrick Sookhdeo

*McLean, Virginia: Isaac, 2009, 176 p., ISBN 978-0978714192, US\$ 14.99.*

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In his book, Dr. Patrick Sookhdeo focuses on apostasy from Islam and appeals to reform and abolish all penalties for apostasy. He starts with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief. . ." as genuine freedom of religion lies in the abolition of all penalties for apostasy from Islam and the granting of freedom to convert to other religions for those who wish to do so. Sookhdeo examines three sections: the classical Islamic teaching on apostasy from the Qur'an, the hadith and the shari'a (theory); contemporary Muslim scholars' different interpretations of the apostasy law (debate); and the application of the apostasy laws that threaten converts from Islam in the world today (practice).

Islam is a total way of life, which Muslims intend to bring to the whole world, as well as a legal system (shari'a), which is key to understanding the Islamic attitude towards those who choose to convert to any other religion (apostates). There are different schools in Islamic law and all of them unanimously prescribe the death penalty for apostates because this is in accordance with Islamic teaching. Although the various punishments for apostasy in the Qur'an seem to relate to the hereafter, the hadith are clear on that issue. At the time of Mohammed and throughout history,

apostates have been killed. Having examined apostasy in the Islamic sources, it is important for contemporary Muslim scholars to relate it to the Islamic social order, Islam is seen as the legitimate foundation of the state and, therefore, conversion to another religion is viewed as treason. In Islamic understanding, freedom of religion means that religion is not a private matter and therefore, in Islamic countries, the life of an apostate is worthless. "A central premise of Islamic human rights is that the interests of Islam and the Muslim community as a whole are paramount. If there is a conflict between these and the interests of the individual, it is the individual's freedom that must be sacrificed" (p. 50). The individual is absorbed into the totalitarian Islamic community governed by God and his revealed law (shari'a). The death penalty is meted out in order to preserve the conformity of the community, and apostasy in all its forms has to be combated. At all costs, Muslims are to resist the apostasy of individuals in order to develop a close-knit community.

The apostate must be destroyed to preserve the integrity of Islamic ideology. The Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in 1990, which was adopted by all states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), strictly subjects all human rights to the authority of the shari'a. It effectively denies individual Muslims the right to convert to another religion. According to Sookhdeo the law of apostasy in Islam is in stark contrast with the modern understanding of human rights and religious freedom. Most Muslim nations have declared Islam to be their state religion and the shari'a to be their primary source of law. Due to shari'a law having been incorporated into the legal system, official charges can be laid against individuals accused of apostasy. However, even if there is no official punishment for apostasy laid down in the constitution or legal system, a Muslim who leaves Islam is often considered a traitor and thus subject to the death penalty. Various methods can be used to punish or even kill apostates, even in places where there is no applicable law. Furthermore, "preventing conversions and punishing converts also becomes a matter of protecting the honour of Islam and the Islamic umma (community)" (p. 64).

Sookhdeo challenges Muslims to be aware of the fact that apostasy is considered a crime and that the practice of the death penalty is contravening human rights. Muslims should call for the reform of the implementation of the shari'a and renounce the apostasy laws. This book is raising awareness of the apostasy laws in Islam and can help Christians to advocate freedom of religion for those who wish to convert. Sookhdeo gives valuable information using the main Islamic sources and case studies and explains the implementation of the anti-apostasy laws in different Muslim countries. This is imperative for the advocacy for the fundamental freedom of religion and the freedom of people around the world.

*Dr Byeong Jun, Cape Town, South Africa*

**Books received (review pending)**

- **A Cloud of Witnesses: Opportunities for ecumenical commemoration**, ed. by Tamara Grdzeldze & Guido Dotti , Geneva, CH: WCC, 2009, 318 p., ISBN-13: 978-2825415337, US\$ 29.00.
- **Defining harm: Religious freedom and the limits of the law**, by Lori G. Beaman, Vancouver BC, Canada: UBC, 2008, 200 p., ISBN 978-0774814294, US\$ 30.96.
- **God's Adventurer: The story of Stuart Windsor and the persecuted church**, by Stuart Windsor, Oxford, UK: Monarch, 2011, 288 p., ISBN 978-1854249999, US\$ 12.78.
- **Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the future of Shari`a**, by Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, Cambridge MA, USA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2008, 336 p., ISBN 978-0674034563, US\$ 16.03.
- **Martyrdom and identity: The self on trial**, Michael P. Jensen, New York, NY, USA: T & T Clark, 2010, 224 p., ISBN 978-0567526281, US\$ 130.00.
- **Martyrdom: A very short introduction**, by Jolyon Mitchell, New York, NY, USA: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012, ISBN 978-0199585236, US\$ 9.56.
- **Muslims and Global Justice**, by Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, Philadelphia, PY, USA: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, 384 p., ISBN 978-0812242867, US\$ 79.95.
- **Politics in a Religious World: Building a religiously literate U.S. foreign policy**, by Eric Patterson, New York, NY, USA: Continuum, 2011, 176 p., ISBN 978-1441108654, US\$ 27.89.
- **Proselytization revisited: Rights talk, free markets and culture wars**, ed. by Rosalind Hackett, Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2008, 320 p., ISBN 978-1845532284, US\$ 29.95.
- **Racism**, by Thomas Schirrmacher - with an essay on caste in India by Richard Howell, (The WEA Global Issues Series, 8), Bonn: Culture and Science Publ., 2012, ISBN 978-3862690350.
- **Religion and Human Rights**, ed. by Nazila Ghanea, Florence, KY, USA: Routledge, 2010, 1672 p., ISBN 978-0415477871, US\$ 1,140.00.
- **Religious tolerance in world religions**, ed. by Jacob Neusner & Bruce Chilton, West Conshohocken, PY, USA: Templeton Foundation, 2008, 368 p., ISBN 978-1599471365, US\$ 83.14.
- **Routledge Handbook of religion and politics**, Jeff Haynes (ed.), Florence KY, USA: Routledge, 2010, 448 p., ISBN 978-0415600293, US\$ 49.95.
- **Sacred fury: Understanding religious violence**, by Charles Selengut, Lanham, Maryland, USA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008, 248 p., ISBN 978-0742560840, US\$ 80.00.