

## Book reviews

### Promoting religious freedom in an age of intolerance

**Barbara Ann Rieffer-Flanagan**

Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2022, 244 pp. ISBN: 9781803925868, £85.00 (hardback)

A pandemic is sweeping the world. But not just COVID-19. A pandemic of persecution is targeting women and men for what they believe (or don't). For the last quarter-century, the United States, like many other states, have worked to promote religious freedom and prevent religious repression. But persecution continues like a plague.

Studies from the Pew Research Center indicate that 84 percent of the global population believes in God or a higher power.<sup>1</sup> However, roughly two-thirds of humanity lives in countries with significant restrictions on faith practices.<sup>2</sup> This is a recipe for rampant human rights violations and unrest as people struggle to peacefully live out their faith. Some people in the field of religious freedom are producing new resources, trying to chart innovative pathways forward. For instance, the *Routledge Handbook of Religious Literacy, Pluralism and Global Engagement*, edited by Chris Seiple and Dennis Hoover, has offered a range of new ideas and solutions.<sup>3</sup> But religious persecution will not go quietly into the night.

The year 2023 marks the 25th anniversary of the International Religious Freedom Act, a groundbreaking piece of legislation that mandated religious freedom as a U.S. foreign policy priority and created special offices, reports, and designations to spur reforms. However, while U.S. efforts have helped the persecuted and brought some positive change, they have not stemmed the seemingly inexorable rise of restrictions identified by Pew every year.

With the International Religious Freedom Act and its various mechanisms turning 25, silver anniversaries are natural inflection points. Consequently, the timing of Barbara Ann Rieffer-Flanagan's book couldn't be better. *Promoting Religious Freedom in an Age of Intolerance* highlights past efforts in the field while elevating examples to pursue further.

Rieffer-Flanagan addresses building up religious freedom, multilateral approaches, education reform, government leadership, civil society engagement, new ideas of human dignity, and other topics. She explores "efforts to develop a

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1 Pew Research Center, "The Global Religious Landscape," 18 December 2012. Available at: <https://pewrsr.ch/3jPCAQT>.

2 Pew Research Center, "Globally, Social Hostilities Related to Religion Decline in 2019," 30 September 2021. Available at: <https://pewrsr.ch/3xbMuPV>.

3 Chris Seiple and Dennis Hoover, *The Routledge Handbook of Religious Literacy, Pluralism and Global Engagement* (London: Routledge, 2022).

religiously tolerant society and then ultimately one where the right to freedom of religion or belief is institutionalized in norms, dispositions, laws, and policies” (20). Rieffer-Flanagan understands the progressive nature of human rights work and recognizes that building on a firm foundation of respect for others can establish a basis for defending different communities’ religious beliefs.

Rieffer-Flanagan has pursued these ideas over a decade of research and reflection. She credits many leading voices with providing insights. Although much of what she extols will feel familiar to those steeped in the world of international religious freedom advocacy, her book is a useful introduction for those wanting to learn more. As the book is of manageable length, it provides a concise overview of past challenges without going into the history of legislation or various theologies.

But the downside of brevity can be the loss of context. Such a relatively short book on this complex topic may not fully achieve her stated goal, which is “to understand the various policies and institutions a society needs as it evolves from an intolerant society where persecution exists to one where individuals are recognized, respected, and protected” (20). However, she effectively explores “how civil society, educational policies, domestic political leadership, international organizations, and foreign policy can make progress on the issue” (20).

Overall, Barbara Ann Rieffer-Flanagan has written a useful and timely book on an issue of international concern. She gives readers a sense of the challenge, information about past efforts, and ideas for a way forward. Hopefully, policy-makers and activists will engage and consider her book.

*Knox Thames formally served as the U.S. Special Advisor for Religious Minorities at the State Department. He is currently writing a book on ending religious persecution.*

## **Law and religion in the Commonwealth: The evolution of case law**

***Renae Barker, Paul T. Babie and Neil Foster (eds.)***

*Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2022, ISBN 978-1-50995-014-0, 334 pp., US \$110 (hardcover)*

Law and religion is a burgeoning area of scholarship, with the frequent and unrelenting publication of articles, monographs and edited collections due to high interest in the associated tensions. It would be easy for good publications to be lost despite the fertile ground. This book, I hope and believe, will not suffer such a fate. Barker, Babie and Foster – three outstanding scholars – have skilfully gathered a diverse range of thinkers who contribute to our understanding of the evo-

lution of law and religion through deep consideration of representative cases from different jurisdictions.

As the three editors are based in Australia, there is an undeniable emphasis on Western jurisdictions such as Australia (with five chapters on Australian cases), the UK and Canada. Nevertheless, cases are also included from Commonwealth nations such as Pakistan, Malaysia, South Africa, India and Nigeria, providing a comprehensive view of case law in the Commonwealth more broadly.

It is, of course, not possible to engage properly with each contribution of an edited collection in a short book review. However, I will ground my following comments in two interconnected themes. First, since this is a religious freedom journal, I will consider religious freedom issues which arise in particular cases, and across cases. Second, since the edited collection aims to describe the *evolution* of case law, I will consider how case law in different jurisdictions has developed both conceptually and temporally with respect to religious freedom. This is especially fruitful because, as the editors note, many of the relevant cases “already build on one another” (8).

Religious freedom is an explicit theme of the book. One part of the book, comprising five chapters, is devoted to this topic; many other contributions explore religious freedom cases or issues, and the editors tend to frame the chapters as engaging with issues pertaining to religious freedom (2). Several chapters consider two sometimes related aspects of religious freedom: the imposition of theological perspectives by secular courts and an implicit hierarchy of rights according to which religious freedom must always yield to equality concerns.

Joshua Neoh points out the problem that the Court of Appeal in the 2009 Malaysian *Archbishop* case sought to impose its own theological perspectives, based on spurious personal research that did not provide an opportunity for the aggrieved parties to make a submission addressing the theological issues (39-45). Neil Foster identifies the 2014 Australian *Cobaw* case as an especially egregious example where “a judge who has no real familiarity with the faith concerned” imposed his own view of what is a core doctrine of the faith and how it should be applied in the life of a believer, despite the submission of contrary evidence by the relevant religious group (274). Kathryn Chan similarly explains that the 1992 Canadian *Lakeside Colony* case held that courts have the authority to decide religious disputes, although they should take care not to impose secular perspectives contrary to the self-understanding of the religious community.

However, the more recent *Wall* case in 2018 indicates that religious freedom principles such as the autonomy of the church imply a jurisdictional limit on courts considering religious disputes (225-226). If this shift continues, it would appropriately uphold the freedom of religious communities to self-define and self-regulate.

Russell Sandberg observes that the “little regard given to religious freedom” in the 2009 consideration of *Ladele* by English courts suggests a “hierarchy of rights with religious discrimination coming below other equality strands,” which gives the impression that religious rights are always trumped by equality rights (54, 56). Foster also agrees with this point in the context of *Cobaw*, which privileges equality over religious freedom by construing religion and religious freedom exemptions extremely narrowly, on the basis that such exemptions undermine the fundamental object of anti-discrimination law (272-273, 278-280). This raises the question of whether there is a “right to have a religious identity” which may be “affirmed and embraced,” especially in public contexts where anti-discrimination laws may interfere with the manifestation of religious identity (291).

Ian Leigh notes that until the 2018 UK *Ashers Baking* case, there was a “clear trend” of equality being favoured over religious freedom, implying an implicit hierarchy (67-68). However, *Ashers* won only by framing their position as a freedom of speech interference, leaving religion to one side. Leigh surmises that using “public reason” to “translate religious language” might be the way out of the culture war (78-79). But this kind of “monolingual adjudication” silences religious perspectives and marginalises the religious tensions which caused the issue to arise in the first place.<sup>1</sup> It will entail the imposition of secular perspectives on theological positions; one may win a legal battle here or there but will lose the culture war. Taking this suggestion to its logical conclusion, Richard Moon argues that having believers provide “external, secular” arguments for religiously motivated civic positions is a “pragmatic” approach which draws an appropriate line between public concerns and private conscience (90-92). “Religious freedom ... must be limited ... to matters that can be viewed as private and outside the scope of politics” (92). However, this approach again imposes a Rawlsian secularisation of religious freedom and marginalises religious perspectives.

Iain Benson’s analysis of the 2005 South African *Fourie* case represents a way forward. While acknowledging the importance of equality considerations, Judge Sachs for the Constitutional Court engaged deeply with the nature of religion and religious freedom, and with its importance for a free, diverse and pluralistic society (232-235). As Benson notes, rather than marginalising or excluding religion, “we should aim for a rich jurisprudence of engagement and genuine inclusion without homogenisation” (229). This would address the problem of secular courts imposing theological perspectives by ensuring that such courts genuinely and empathetically engage with religious perspectives. More broadly, recognising

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<sup>1</sup> See Joel Harrison, “Towards re-thinking “balancing” in the courts and the legislature’s role in protecting religious liberty” (2019), 93(9) *Australian Law Journal* 734, 738.

that equality means “equal respect across difference” rather than the imposition of a flat uniformity promotes “a more comprehensive understanding of the good” (229, 231). Benson suggests that methods to achieve this goal include enhancing the understanding that religious freedom is a “public” and “communal” right that should be protected and accommodated by the state (235-241). This stance strikes a more appropriate balance between religious freedom and equality according to which both are valued and upheld, rather than one being subservient to the other.

Regardless of the diverse views on such matters, as the editors aptly put it, “this volume offers something for everyone interested in law and religion in the Commonwealth” (8).

*Alex Deagon, Senior Lecturer, School of Law, Queensland University of Technology*

## **What about us? Global perspectives on redressing religious inequalities**

***Mariz Tadros (ed.)***

*Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development, 2022, 332 pp., ISBN: 978-1804700105. Available at: <http://bit.ly/40Lbqvi>.*

Those working in the field of religious freedom, peace studies, or development studies will surely be interested in this volume. Making a unique contribution to a cross-section of academic discourses, the book presents a substantial number of well-researched case studies from diverse areas in the non-Western world. The case studies offer a treasure trove of information for both area specialists and discipline theorists. Area specialists will benefit from the focused literature reviews in the respective chapters on Israel; Oyo, Nigeria; Bangalore, India; wider India; Limpopo, South Africa; the Rwenzori mountains in Uganda; Pakistan; and Sudan. Theorists and people working in development or peace studies will appreciate the transparent methodology articulated in each case study, along with the substantive bibliographies and original research.

Along with presenting detailed case studies, the volume seeks to redress the lack of research on the impact of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) on development. Virtually all nine case studies begin by highlighting this research gap. Numerous studies in this field have focused on issues of economic poverty, lack of access to health care, avoiding systems of dependence, and caring for the environment. This book aims to incorporate FoRB into these conversations, to show its importance for supporting the whole person and entire communities.

The holistic lens presented by the authors is demonstrated through case studies involving many religious traditions: Judaism, Sunni Islam, various expressions of Hinduism, Shia Islam, scheduled caste Indians, African Traditional Religions, those with general spirituality, and those with no belief or religious affiliation. In the introductory chapter, the editor frames the subsequent case studies as an avenue for highlighting the problem of ‘religious otherization’ for people living in poverty. As various state actors and NGOs work toward the Sustainable Development Goals, this book is a reminder of the important role FoRB can play in promoting inclusive development.

*What About us?* makes a unique contribution by moving the conversation beyond the post-colonial origins and critiques of development studies. In virtually every case study, minority voices are placed at the forefront. The authors of several chapters articulate their positionality as local actors, with all the benefits and drawbacks of a local perspective. This is part of the book’s contribution to academic discourse, but it also adds tremendous value as these perspectives can be hard for geographically distant researchers to access. As Tadros states explicitly in the first chapter, “The book situates religious equality in relation to global narratives around inclusive development as well as in relation to local conceptions of recognition and justice” (4).

Readers approaching this book with a particular topical interest are likely to find their topic addressed somewhere. The case studies are grouped into four main categories, the headings of which demonstrate their interdisciplinary nature: Religious inequalities in education, health, and economic wellbeing; Tensions between national models of development, religious equality and respect for FoRB; External actors’ promotion of FoRB; and Ideology and political will. The chapter titles give equally transparent clues to the discerning reader.

As already noted, area specialists and theorists alike will find plenty of information that has been clearly situated in particular academic disciplines. The case studies each present their unique methodology, though the first chapter suggests a reliance on grounded theory throughout. The authors have taken great care in their presentation of information. Each chapter offers clearly discernible research methods with some justification. In most cases, the researchers also present their sources, questionnaires, and tables as appendices. This gives the inquisitive reader plenty of raw information that could be analyzed with a different lens.

As is often the case, this strength of the book is also a weakness at times. It can feel repetitive to work through each chapter’s clear explication of methodology, sources, data, findings, bibliography, and appendices. Readers interested in specific components of case studies will benefit from the clear signposting and title

structure that will enable them to skip around to points of interest. However, this format can make reading the book straight through from start to finish tiring. The writing is uneven in quality and seems overly detailed in places, but the details may also be of interest to many readers.

I expect that readers will be delighted with the cross-disciplinary nature of this work and the diverse religious, geographic, and non-Western perspectives included. I commend the effort and work invested in producing this volume, especially the sensitivity and care devoted to advancing development studies beyond post-colonial critiques. This volume offers a refreshing, clear-eyed analysis of real problems rooted in local contexts.

*Dr Kyle Wisdom, International Institute for Religious Freedom*

## **Human Rights Commitments of Islamic States: Sharia, Treaties and Consensus**

***Paul McDonough***

*Oxford, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022, 305pp. ISBN 978-1509943104, £26.63 (paperback)*

This book seeks to determine whether (a) the human rights commitments Islamic states have made and (b) Islamic law or *sharia* are compatible with the international standard set by United Nations treaties. It highlights both possible alignments and tensions between Islamic law as implemented by Islamic states and international human rights law.

McDonough begins with an overview of the political history of Islam and of Islamic law, underscoring the relationship between *sharia* and the state in terms of institutions of governance. He examines the legal nature of Islamic states and the human rights they have committed to uphold.

For McDonough, an Islamic state is defined as one that governs in accordance with *sharia*. However, two more layers of law bind the Islamic state: international treaty commitments – such as the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the 1990 Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam, and the Arab League’s 2004 Arab Charter on Human Rights – and a “modern Islamic consensus” (3). McDonough notes that the interpretation of Islamic law generally relies on ancient scholars even though in principle, the *umma* (Islamic community) has the right to review old and new legislation to determine the legality of the law in relation to *sharia* guidelines.

Of the 57 member states of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (founded in 1969), 25 proclaim themselves to be secular states, five do not address this topic, Indonesia embraces monotheism generally, and 26 have Islam as their state

religion or as a governing principle. Those Islamic states, seated at the United Nations, have all agreed to observe international human rights norms.

After examining the constitutions of this last group of 26 Islamic states, McDonough concludes that the main areas of tension concern civil matters such as divorce or apostasy (renouncing Islam). In his opinion, finding common ground in those areas may require serious effort, but in general, nearly all Islamic states reflect international human rights standards.

Critics who state that Islamic states cannot implement human rights and democracy are, in the author's opinion, ignoring the fact that human rights violations committed by Islamic states may be due to the incorrect application of Islamic law, which in fact offers a certain flexibility that can be applied in favor of international norms. Given this flexibility, Islamic states can select alternative interpretations that "more closely reflect international human rights language" (207).

In analyzing the constitutions of the Islamic states, McDonough also considers *siyar* (the law of war and attitude of the Islamic state towards non-Muslims) and aliens in *fiqh* (in Islamic law, this term refers to the set of rules that determine the state's attitude toward non-Muslims or *dhimmi*s). Throughout the book, he draws on the opinion of Pakistani scholar Abū l-A'lā Maudūdī (1903-1979), who stated that *dhimmi* in Islamic states always enjoyed great freedoms as long as they respected Islamic norms in the public sphere. McDonough also refers to the Afghan professor of Islamic law, Hashim Kamali (born 1944), who sought a synthesis between "western" human rights and Islamic law in his writings, although *sharia* remained the main point of reference for all his arguments.

McDonough emphasizes that human dignity is a core concern of *sharia* and is not limited in any way in the Qur'an. Like the international human rights declarations, the *siyar* agreement is binding on the various parties, since contracts require compliance. Therefore, the concept of *siyar* could be seen as another commonality between *sharia* law and international conventions.

The book's aim to find areas of compatibility between Islamic law as applied in Islamic states and international treaty commitments is a challenging one, and McDonough carries out this project rather vaguely. It seems that the explanation of various historical circumstances takes up more space than the analysis of the 26 Islamic state constitutions. Even though the author finds few disagreements and tries to reduce their number even further, controversial topics such as divorce, apostasy, polygamy or inheritance remain areas of conflict. Accordingly, the compatibility of *sharia* and Western human rights declarations remains, to some extent, an open question.

*Esther Schirrmacher, Islamic Relations Coordinator, World Evangelical Alliance*

## **The China Nexus: Thirty Years in and Around the Chinese Communist Party's Tyranny**

**Benedict Rogers**

*Ottawa: Optimum Publishing International, 2022, 360 pp. ISBN: 978-0888903273, US \$34.95*

While there has been no shortage of reporting on the myriad abuses of Xi Jinping's regime in recent years, these stories often lack context. Periodic reports produced by NGOs, think tanks, and governmental entities present a more complete picture, but their readership is often limited to specialists and policymakers. The strength of Benedict Rogers's book is his ability to document convincingly for a wide audience why these stories matter in today's world. Rogers combines his decades of experience as an activist, journalist, NGO leader, and deputy chair of the UK Conservative Party's Human Rights Commission with a thorough and penetrating analysis of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) systematic attacks on freedom both within China's borders and beyond.

Following an introduction in which Rogers describes his expulsion from Hong Kong in 2017, he recounts a more hopeful era in which he served as an English teacher in China during his college years and then as a journalist for a trade publication in Hong Kong, immediately after the territory's return to Chinese rule. Relating his personal experience with new media restrictions (largely due to self-censorship) in the wake of the handover, Rogers introduces a recurring theme: the inability or unwillingness of many in the free world to recognize the signs of growing tightening in the decades preceding Xi's rise to power.

Subsequent chapters cover the CCP's attacks on civil society, law and the media; restrictions on Chinese Christians; Tibet's history of repression; the Uyghurs in Xinjiang; persecution of the Falun Gong religious minority and the practice of human organ harvesting; the demise of "One Country, Two Systems" in Hong Kong; Taiwan's struggle to retain de facto independence in the face of mounting Chinese aggression; China's involvement in Myanmar; and the uneasy yet mutually beneficial relationship between China and North Korea. Rogers closes with a wakeup call to the global community, with specific recommendations for countering the CCP's pernicious influence as it seeks to challenge international norms through the UN and other international bodies, advances economic and strategic interests with its Belt and Road Initiative, and politicizes overseas Chinese communities.

The patterns that emerge in this trajectory of repression will be familiar to *IJRF* readers. Rogers shows how policies used to subjugate Tibetans have subsequently been implemented in Xinjiang and Hong Kong. In the case of

religious believers, the current Sinification campaign targets “foreign” beliefs and practices while promoting the CCP’s socialist values. Those deemed a threat to the regime are subject to varying degrees of forced assimilation, surveillance, intimidation, detention, incarceration, and criminal prosecution. Outside China, the regime manipulates existing power relationships in pursuit of its own interests, with little concern for the long-term stability or prosperity of the countries involved. In recent years, the CCP’s repertoire has expanded to include increased detention of foreign nationals and pressuring foreign governments to assist in apprehending individuals sought by the Chinese government.

Rogers groups into three clusters the measures he recommends to counteract the CCP’s aggressive tactics. First, the international community needs to put a stop to the impunity of China’s leaders by holding them accountable through sanctions and, where possible, legal action. Second, more should be done to support and publicly recognize dissidents and to advance Internet freedom. Finally, global leaders must take steps to reduce their dependency on China, state clearly their intentions concerning Taiwan, combat Chinese influence operations abroad, and form alliances among democracies. As an example of this last strategy, Benedict mentions the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC), a cross-party global movement founded in 2020 and comprising lawmakers from 23 countries.

Although Rogers states that the book is not an autobiography or a memoir, his role as a participant in many of the stories he tells so passionately gives the reader a front-row seat in the drama that is unfolding as China assumes center stage on the world scene. At some points, however, he risks overstating his case. His assertions, for example, that Christians are directly targeted by China’s social credit system and that online worship services have been shut down (101) may be true in certain instances, but at the time of writing, this is not the case nationwide.

That Rogers paints the Chinese regime with a very broad brush is to be expected, given the book’s purpose. While there is no excuse for the regime’s abuses, Rogers’s approach unfortunately leaves little room for a more nuanced look at factors that have historically complicated the relationship between the state and religious communities in China, dynamics that today figure prominently in the Xi regime’s approach. Rogers describes in glowing terms, for example, the 2019 religious freedom conference initiated by the US Ambassador for International Religious Freedom and hosted in Taiwan. Given Taiwan’s role as a political and military flashpoint in the US-China relationship, the introduction of religion into the equation would inevitably fuel the longstanding argument by Chinese officials that the United States is using religion to undermine the CCP’s rule. One may

argue that religious believers in China face enough trouble as it is; why implicate them in the conflict over Taiwan?

These caveats aside, *The China Nexus* provides an invaluable resource for untangling the many threads of the CCP's attacks on freedom. One hopes it will encourage, in the words of one of Rogers's interviewees, a much-needed shift in the global community's approach to China from "strategic ambiguity" to "strategic clarity".

*Dr Brent Fulton, ChinaSource*

## **Race, religion, and COVID-19: Confronting White supremacy in the pandemic**

**Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, ed.**

*New York: New York University Press, 2022, 312 pp. ISBN: 978-1479810222, US \$30 (paperback)*

This book explores the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism against African Americans that clashed in 2020. As the title suggests, it is highly critical of white evangelicals in the US.

This edited volume includes a variety of articles focusing on America's experience of COVID-19 under President Donald Trump and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement with the police killing of George Floyd on 25 May 2020. The US was hit very hard by COVID-19, suffering nearly one-fourth of global fatalities during the first year of the pandemic.

The authors note that while many large White evangelical churches remained open, Black pastors closed their churches and moved services online. African Americans were particularly affected by COVID-19. This was due to poverty, lack of access to healthcare, and having jobs in essential services where they were required to continue working through lockdowns.

In the binary division that exists in the US, the authors and editor are clearly on the left side of the political spectrum. They are pro-Black, pro-women, and pro-LGBTQ. Even though all the authors are academics, an online reviewer commented that they are all so 'woke' that their reliability is in question. Unfortunately, this situation represents the right-left division in the US, which is so pervasive that people seem unwilling even to listen to those on the other side of the divide.

David P. Gushee's article, "Toxic religion, toxic churches, and toxic policies," describes the premise of the book quite well:

While serious debates need to take place at the intersection of religion, ethics, and COVID-19, the big story here has been the sustained difficul-

ty of white fundamentalists and evangelicals in dealing with COVID-19 on the terms required for the social good. (231)

Unfortunately, these “white fundamentalists and evangelicals” are lumped together in this and other articles and denounced for supporting Trump and ignoring the plague of racism. Gushee builds on earlier writings on the history of evangelicalism in the US, stating that it developed in the US in the 1940s as a softer version of fundamentalism. He also insists that evangelicalism is inherently White and racist. This is a dubious claim even about US evangelicals and certainly not generally the case globally, as the World Evangelical Alliance, founded in Britain in 1846, has a long history of speaking against slavery.

The book has several articles of interest. The first article is by the editor, Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, an associate professor of ethics and society at Vanderbilt University. She explains that the Black church in the US is not just a spiritual haven but also a center for economic cooperation, an arena for political activity, a sponsor of education and a refuge in a hostile white world. Closing Black churches was therefore profoundly challenging for African American communities who were caught in the “crosshairs of the pandemic and racial conflict” (22). Floyd-Thomas is critical of many Black churches that rest on the laurels of past victories in racial justice but remained on the sidelines of Black Lives Matter. She gives some examples of churches and Christian communities that found new ways to minister to Black Christians in need during the twin pandemics.

Tink Tinker presents a polemic on how COVID-19 sits in a long line of diseases used against Indigenous Americans to clear the land for exploitation by White people. Blanche Bong Cook writes a personal account of her parents, a Korean mother and African American father, and their challenges as an interracial couple in America. Miguel A. de la Torre describes how Latino Americans were blamed for the pandemic.

Why is this book of interest? The US has a long history of promoting religious freedom domestically and internationally. But articles by Juan M. Floyd-Thomas, Gushee and Marla F. Frederick argue forcefully that this is a White evangelical interest and initiative. They point to racist roots of religious freedom, as slaveholders argued that religious freedom protected their rights to own slaves. Similarly, evangelicals used religious freedom arguments to support segregation of Blacks in the US. Frederick surmises, “This alliance between the right of white Christians to deny Black rights based upon their religious freedom [sic] made religious freedom a less salient and attractive argument for Black religionists” (253).

There are important lessons to be learned for those inside and outside the US. In the US, more White evangelicals need to take up issues of racial justice and

reconciliation. The National Association of Evangelicals is addressing this concern, as have other evangelical organizations. Advocates for religious freedom must understand the history of this issue in the US in order to right some historic wrongs. US-based international religious freedom organizations can initiate discussions across racial lines as they advocate for religious freedom, especially in West Africa since Nigeria currently tops the list for Christians killed because of their faith.

Outside the US, evangelicals are often stereotyped by the same perception of White evangelicals that is portrayed in this book – that evangelicals are White, Trump-supporting racists. This is not true even of all American evangelicals, and certainly not of evangelicals outside the US. But the label “evangelical” has been tainted globally and negatively impacts advocacy for religious freedom. The articles in this book help us understand critiques of White American evangelicals from Christians within the US. Hopefully, this understanding can help evangelicals around the world address the stereotypes.

*Janet Epp Buckingham, Director, Global Advocacy, World Evangelical Alliance, Canada*

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