

Book Reviews

Blood and Water: The Life and Martyrdom of Shahbaz Bhatti

Matt Youcum, illustrated by Jordon Holt

San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2026, 120 pp., ISBN: 978-1621648918, US \$17.99

Reading *Blood and Water* felt personal. For me, the story of Shahbaz Bhatti, the Pakistani Christian politician who rose to become his country's minister of minority affairs before being assassinated in 2011, is not just something in a novel. It captures the experience of growing up as a Christian in Pakistan.

This graphic novel takes us back to Bhatti's early life and shows how deeply rooted he was in Christ. It makes clear that his courage didn't come from politics or personality but from his faith. The author powerfully juxtaposes Bhatti's actions alongside biblical stories. For example, when Bhatti stands up for others, it echoes the Good Samaritan. Youcum's presentation demonstrates that Scripture wasn't just something he believed in, but something he lived out.

The book effectively depicts Bhatti's heartfelt concern for people – not only Christians but all who suffer. He expressed a love that went beyond community lines. It was the agape love of Christ. His mission was never limited in scope; he stood for anyone who needed justice.

Youcum does not ignore reality. He writes honestly about the marginalization of Christians in Pakistan. But instead of leaving you with heaviness, he points to something deeper: how faith in Christ can give a person courage even in the hardest situations. Bhatti's life is proof of that.

For me, this story connects to a memory I cannot forget. Shahbaz Bhatti was my father's friend as well. When he was martyred, I was in fifth grade. Someone came to pick me up from school early. When I reached home, my father was in tears. He said, "Shahbaz was a lion. He is martyred." I didn't fully understand then, but I remember the weight of that day. It was a very long day. My father kept talking about him, his courage, his faith, and his stand for truth. That was the day Shahbaz Bhatti became my hero.

As I read Youcum's retelling, I understood the story better. Bhatti's life reminds me of David. When you know you are called by God, you don't fear giants. And he didn't fear bullets.

Blood and Water explains where that courage came from. Bhatti's relationship with Christ shaped everything in his life: his decisions, his voice, and his willingness to stand firm, even when it cost him his life. As a result, this book is not just a biography; it is a testimony.

Pakistan still needs people like Shahbaz Bhatti who will stand up not only for their own group, but for others too. His life reminds us that even in persecution, faith can still speak, and that faith grows stronger amidst persecution.

Youcum does not inflate Bhatti into a larger-than-life person, but the book doesn't reduce him either. It simply tells the truth about a man who lived with conviction. For me, it brought back memories, but it also gave them meaning.

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Freedom of Religion or Belief in the European Convention on Human Rights: A Reappraisal

Caroline K. Roberts

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023, 276 pp., ISBN 978-1009233620, £95.00

In this published version of her doctoral thesis, Caroline K. Roberts sets out to challenge what she refers to as the “classic approach” to defining the fundamental right to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) as a two-part norm. According to this approach, ECHR Article 9 (1) defines the “forum internum,” which enjoys unlimited protection, and Article 9 (2) defines the “forum externum,” which can be limited by law if certain conditions are met. Roberts endeavours to show that the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) itself does not support such a hierarchical distinction between the two fora, but rather sees these dimensions of FoRB as interrelated and sets limits on both of them at times, depending on the merits of each case. Therefore, she concludes, the right to FoRB is better understood by applying a “loose concentric circles model,” in which the level of protection depends on two crucial criteria: how close the imposed limitation comes to the “forum internum” and how relevant are the colliding legal goods that need to be balanced against FoRB in the given case.

Roberts begins by describing the theoretical framework she is about to deconstruct, based on the textual basis of the ECHR, relevant *travaux préparatoires*, and comparable norms in international law. She also provides a systematic analysis of the core principles governing the right to FoRB under the ECtHR's jurisprudence. In the second and main part of the book, she examines and categorizes the Court's case law on Article 9, substantiating the loose concentric circles model and disproving a strict binary and hierarchical approach. In the third part, she elaborates her own thesis on how FoRB is correctly understood in the context of the ECHR.

I agree with Roberts's assumption that Articles 9 (1) and (2) must be understood as a coherent right, not two essentially different rights. Likewise, her de-

scription of the ECHR's concurring understanding, as deduced from the overview of its jurisprudence, is apt. However, from the German legal perspective, this information is not surprising or even new. What Roberts described as the "classic approach" to understanding FoRB in the ECHR is simply not the prevailing opinion in German-language publications on the issue. From a German perspective, therefore, her theses rather amount to stating the obvious.

I tend to believe that scholars' understanding of norms of international law is still very much shaped by their legal training and by the most common interpretations in their home context of the fundamental right in question. In Germany, the Constitutional Court has consistently held since 1968 that all the different aspects of freedom subsumed under FoRB are in fact a unitary and coherent right. And while the text of the respective norm of the German Basic Law (Article 4) does not authorize the state to impose limitations on this fundamental right, it is undisputed practice that colliding fundamental rights of third parties and other constitutional values must be weighed against the exercise of FoRB by both legislators and courts.

Jurisprudence of the German Constitutional Court and academic literature have examined the process of balancing rights in much detail. It is the prevailing opinion that the forum internum must indeed not be restricted, whereas limitations of the forum externum may be justified and even obligatory so as to protect other competing legal rights. However – and this is a very important point of difference from Roberts – the forum internum and forum externum cannot be superimposed on and are not congruent with the rights listed in ECHR Articles 9 (1) and (2), respectively. Rather, the forum internum signifies the right to religious thought, while the forum externum is the right to manifest a religion or belief in public, i.e. in necessary contact with other holders of fundamental rights.

At the very moment when a thought leads to public action, it may collide with other people's fundamental rights or core constitutional values. There is a very thin line between thought and deed, as even making a thought public could, in theory and depending on its nature and content, place an imposition on other people. But does this mean that the stout protection of the forum internum is of no practical value? By no means! The key function of the concept of forum internum, as understood in the German legal context, is about the scope of FoRB in the first place. People can have many thoughts, opinions, convictions, principles and values. However, only a few of them are matters of religion or belief. Though similar in outlook, some might be philosophical or political, for instance. But if a thought leads to an action, and if that action is limited by the state, the level of protection that action enjoys or the level of limitations open to the state might well depend on the right invoked or, more concretely, on the wording of the norm protecting the respective right.

The forum internum, therefore, remains highly relevant for legal practice for two reasons:

- 1) If someone can demonstrate that the relevant action is based on a religious conviction, that person may enjoy a higher level of protection as if the very same action were based on different grounds, depending on the wording of the norm invoked. The closer an action is to a firmly held conviction grounded in religion or belief, the more legal weight it carries when compared to colliding or competing rights, especially if these have a lesser level of protection in the law.
- 2) At the same time, the more extensively an action affects other people, i.e. the higher the level of interaction with another party or society in general, the heavier becomes the weight of colliding rights in the balancing. Therefore, proximity to the forum internum is determined not only by the character of a conviction as “religious” but also by the extent to which its manifestation causes interactions with others – potentially including collisions. For this simple reason, each juridical decision must always be based on the merits of the case, not in a merely schematic manner.

Although I concur that the loose concentric circles model is the best way to illustrate these interdependencies, I would have wished for a deeper reflection on the function of the forum internum, which can only be hinted at here. Instead, Roberts’s analysis remains relatively static in its concentration on disproving the so-called classic model. However, to the extent that the “classic” understanding is indeed present in English and French legal literature on the issue, the book does serve an important purpose in furthering the discourse.

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Religiously Exclusive, Socially Inclusive? A Religious Response

Bernhard Reitsma and Erika van Nes-Visscher (eds.)

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023, 316 pp., ISBN 978-1041185222,

€55.99

In a time of growing religious diversity and interfaith tensions, this volume explores a significant paradox: can an individual or tradition hold exclusivist religious beliefs while promoting an inclusive and welcoming society? The book

brings together a diverse group of scholars from fields such as biblical studies, theology, religious studies, and missiology to examine this issue.

The editors frame their inquiry within the traditional typology of religious attitudes: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. However, they challenge the perceived rigidity of these categories, asking whether doctrinal exclusivism must inevitably result in social exclusion. The book argues that all religions make exclusive claims to some extent, which creates a natural tension in pluralistic societies. How can a tradition that claims its own truth avoid marginalizing or displaying hostility towards others?

A key element of the book's theoretical framework is the concept of humble exclusivism, introduced by contributor Dirk-Martin Grube. This approach redefines exclusivism not as a strict, binary true/false dichotomy but as a *justification-ist* stance. Humble exclusivists can regard their religious claims as true for themselves while also recognising the limits of human understanding and adopting an epistemically modest attitude. This stance enables deep personal conviction without the arrogance or hostility often linked to fundamentalism. This framework, which supports much of the volume's discussion, implies that one can be faithful to their tradition while engaging respectfully with others.

Methodologically, the book is interdisciplinary and comparative. Its 18 chapters guide the reader from abstract concepts to practical applications. Contributions from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars ensure a broad and balanced perspective.

Early chapters conduct conceptual analysis, deconstructing and defining terms like "exclusivism" to reveal their nuances. Much of the book focuses on analyzing religious texts and historical contexts. For instance, Joep Dubbink and Klass Sponk examine passages from the Hebrew Bible concerning apostasy, while Peter-Ben Smit discusses 1 Corinthians and the Pauline understanding of exclusion. Yaser Ellethy contributes to Islamic hermeneutics, addressing the concept of *al-walā' wa al-barā'*). These explore how various traditions have historically navigated inclusion and exclusion.

The volume includes social-scientific essays that use methods such as social identity theory employed to explain group dynamics, particularly in chapters discussing apostasy and the strong in-group reactions it provokes. It also incorporates postcolonial critiques, ethnographic insights from the Pacific Islands, and sociological studies of contemporary church communities to ground the theoretical discussion in real-world consequences.

The overarching argument, synthesized by the editors in the concluding chapter, is that religious exclusivism and social inclusion, though they exist in tension with each other, are not inherently incompatible. The key lies in how a tradition

interprets and lives out its doctrines. If exclusivism is tempered by virtues like humility, charity, and a recognition of common humanity, it can coexist with social harmony. The editors argue for a continuous process of self-criticism and hermeneutical renewal within religious communities, to ensure that exclusive claims do not devolve into social harm.

The volume's case studies provide significant insights, with Leo Mock explores how modern rabbis operate online and offer nuanced responses to questions about idolatry that go beyond simple exclusion. Yaser Ellethy and Razi Quadir examine Islamic doctrines concerning "otherness" and apostasy, highlighting a spectrum of interpretations – from strict classical law to modern re-interpretations emphasising social cohesion. Other authors look at how early Christian communities managed boundaries and how Jesus Christ interacted with outsiders as models for inclusiveness today.

Beyond interreligious dynamics, the book also considers intra-church relations. Laura Dijkhuizen and Jack Barentsen's chapter on Dutch evangelical churches discusses gender-related inclusion and exclusion, highlighting that the challenge of inclusivity extends to issues such as women's roles and LGBTQ members. This broadens the conversation, suggesting that a genuinely inclusive ethic must address exclusion at every level.

One of the book's key strengths is its broad, comparative perspective. By uniting Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars in a single discussion, it shows how the tension between exclusive truth and social harmony is a challenge across different faiths. This approach promotes a deeper understanding of common difficulties and the distinct solutions each tradition offers, making it a useful resource for interfaith dialogue.

The development of "humble exclusivism" as an alternative to inflexible fundamentalism and relativistic pluralism marks another significant contribution. It provides a philosophically and theologically strong framework for individuals to affirm their faith without disparaging others. This concept is compelling in its focus on epistemic humility – the notion that one can believe something is true while recognising that one's understanding is fallible.

Moreover, the book intentionally highlights marginalized voices. Eleonora Hof's chapter on Native American communities criticizes how exclusionary religious narratives were used to justify colonial oppression, urging a re-evaluation of these stories in the quest for justice. Simon Ririhena's contribution from the Pacific Islands introduces the indigenous concept of *Pela* ("to be one") as a practical approach for peacebuilding across religious divides. These insights from the Majority World and postcolonial settings are essential for a fair and balanced theological discussion.

The volume does not shy away from controversy. It directly addresses the difficult issue of apostasy, which Bernard Reitsma describes as “the most exclusive form of religious and social exclusion.” Chapters by Robert Ermers, Laura Dijkhuizen and Jack Barentsen, and Quadir analyse the historical punishments for leaving a faith, the social dynamics behind those punishments, and the modern movements towards more lenient interpretations. By approaching this sensitive topic with academic rigour, the book provides an honest reflection on the darkest aspects of religious exclusivism and suggests that traditions must evolve on this issue to truly become socially inclusive.

The book’s central premise may not satisfy everyone. Staunch exclusivists might see humble exclusivism as a dilution of true faith. At the same time, ardent pluralists or secularists might argue that abandoning all exclusive claims is the only path to genuine inclusion. The book acknowledges this tension, aiming not to resolve it for all but to show that theological particularity does not have to engender social divisiveness.

Religiously Exclusive, Socially Inclusive? is a timely, nuanced, and courageous volume. It provides a robust framework and compelling examples demonstrating that religious communities can hold firm to their convictions while actively contributing to the common good. The book demonstrates that deep faith and social harmony are not mutually exclusive, but instead require a deliberate and ongoing commitment to humility, self-reflection, and compassion. It offers a hopeful path forward for navigating religious differences in our pluralistic world, encouraging a religious response that reconciles truth with love and conviction with cooperation.

Prof Dr Godfrey Harold, Principal Cape Town Baptist Seminary, Research Associate, Stellenbosch University

Human Dignity, Religion and the Law: Pluralism and Reasonable Accommodation of Religious Practices

Mark Hill KC and María-José Valero-Estarellas (eds.)

Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2025, 198 pp., ISBN 978-1032820767, € 175 (hardcover).

This book distinguishes itself by balancing conceptual analysis with applied discussions across specific legal domains, such as wedding law, data protection, asylum, and intra-religious conflict. Together, the contributions offer a multi-layered account of how dignity might ground a more inclusive approach to religious pluralism in liberal democracies.

Mark Hill’s opening chapter frames the collection by emphasizing dignity as both the foundation and taproot of human rights. He regards reasonable accom-

modation and conscientious objection as positive expressions of human dignity, by allowing persons of faith to bear witness to their convictions rather than being subsumed under majoritarian norms. Indeed, as I have argued in my own writing, freedom of conscience performs constitutional functions that go beyond individual autonomy. It guarantees authenticity of personality, sustains dissent as a democratic virtue, and decentralizes authority to the individual, thereby serving as a structural safeguard against uniformity and potential totalitarianism.

Several chapters sharpen this conceptual strand. András Sajó and Renáta Uitz examine European case law on ritual slaughter, noting a contested tendency to collapse strict proportionality into a balancing of fundamental rights against majoritarian practices. In their view, what should be a principled adjudication of rights is often reduced to weighing religion against commercial or communal interests. The divergences between courts illustrate that religious accommodation, while foundational, can appear elusive in application.

Sajó and Uitz remind us that accommodation should not be cast merely as a mechanism of minority protection. As they put it, “It is unfortunate to justify accommodation as a question of minority protection. What is protected is conscience, irrespective of a person’s belonging to a religious minority or majority.” This reorients the debate away from group-based claims and back toward conscience as a universal human capacity, echoing Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Fernando Simón-Yarza upholds conscientious objection, but whereas Sajó and Uitz focus on the “why” of protection – because conscience is universally worthy – Simón-Yarza interrogates the “what”: what precisely is being objected to? He remarks that describing conscientious objection as an “exemption from a legal duty” presupposes the legitimacy of the duty, reducing the objector’s stance to a tolerated minority preference. This approach, he argues, risks legitimizing contested mandates, such as abortion provision, and obscures violations of conscience by treating them as tolerable exceptions.

Burkhard J. Berkmann explores the application of legal pluralism to questions of religious freedom. Drawing on a range of German commentators, he uncovers a paradox: while legal pluralist theories often celebrate the coexistence of multiple orders, they risk failing to take seriously the specific nature of religious law. Religious traditions typically advance a value-oriented concept of law – grounded in revelation, cosmic order, or justice – that sits uneasily with the functional and often thin definitions of law used in pluralist frameworks.

Berkmann complements the conceptual discussions in the book by shifting the focus from the individual’s claim of conscience (as developed by Sajó, Uitz, and Simón-Yarza) to the structural question of how legal systems recognize or mar-

ginalize religious normativity. Whereas Hill's concern is how dignity grounds accommodation and Simón Yarza challenges the legitimacy of contested duties, Berkmann presses the further question of whether the legal frameworks within which these debates occur are themselves adequate for capturing the normative character of religious law. This underscores that the conversation on accommodation is not only about individual exemption but also about the architecture of law itself.

Alongside these conceptual interventions, several chapters take up practical legal issues. Frank Cranmer critiques the rigidity of wedding law in England and Wales, showing how current rules restrict couples from marrying in ways that reflect their convictions. He endorses shifting regulation from buildings to officiants to ensure more equal recognition of diverse beliefs. Such reform, though not a panacea – it cannot, for instance, resolve the persistence of unregistered religious ceremonies – would nonetheless enable ceremonies to embody couples' values more authentically. While Berkmann explores how law might conceptually accommodate plural normative orders, Cranmer shows what this looks like in practice: recalibrating legal categories to respect conscience in one of life's most significant moments.

Fabio Balsamo turns to the intersection of religious freedom and data protection under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), highlighting tensions between privacy and the right to religious communication. He underscores that freedom of religion today must be considered not only in constitutional or philosophical terms, but also through the technical regimes of data protection and digital communication that increasingly shape religious life.

Stefano Testa Bappenheim considers ecclesiastical asylum in Germany, where churches have sheltered migrants facing deportation. Although courts deny a legal basis for resisting deportation orders, the state has come to tolerate the practice out of respect for the churches' humanitarian mission. This demonstrates how conscience-based claims may persist even when denied formal legal recognition, illustrating the varied ways in which such claims are articulated, tolerated, or resisted across different legal registers.

Silvia Baldassarre underscores the vulnerability of non-religious asylum seekers, urging refugee law to embrace atheistic and humanist worldviews as equally valid grounds for protection. In this sense, she extends the book's concern with human dignity into the often-neglected right to live openly by convictions that reject or question religious frameworks.

Marianna Napolitano turns the lens of pluralism inward, focusing on tensions between the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church over proselytism, canonical territory, and missionary activity. She thus illustrates that intra-religious diversity is as challenging as inter-religious coexistence.

Mirjam van Schaik and Jasper Doomen examine the fragile status of the right to apostasy in international law, tracing how the explicit recognition of the freedom to change one's religion – enshrined in 1948 – has been gradually diluted through textual shifts in subsequent instruments. The result, they argue, is an ambivalent framework that weakens the normative force of one of the most essential dimensions of religious freedom. This chapter resonates with other contributions in the volume by showing that freedom of religion or belief depends not only on accommodation in practice but also on precise conceptual framing in law, without which the protection of conscience risks erosion.

The volume's dual character is its strength. Its conceptual chapters demonstrate why dignity and accommodation matter as structural principles essential to democracy and human flourishing, while applied chapters show how these principles operate – often imperfectly – across diverse legal regimes. The cumulative effect is a compelling case for understanding reasonable accommodation as the natural expression of dignity in plural societies. For scholars of law and religion, constitutional law, and human rights, this book is a valuable resource. *Felipe Carvalho, Postdoctoral Researcher, Universidade de Coimbra, ORCID: 0000-0002-5765-836X*

The Geopolitics of Religious Soft Power: How States Use Religion in Foreign Policy

Peter Mandaville (ed.)

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023, 323 pp., ISBN 978-0197605837, US \$114.99.

Mandaville and Hoffman observe, “Religion seems to feature prominently in the international relations of many states around the world today” (1). This shouldn't be surprising, if only for two reasons. Firstly, as of 2020, more than 75 percent of the world's population identified with a religion.¹ Secondly, religious violence has been rising globally.²

To better understand state foreign policy in our contemporary world, the contributors to this book “explore how states across multiple world regions, and featuring a diverse range of faith traditions, incorporate religion” as a form of power and, more specifically, soft power, in their foreign policy (1).

In the opening chapter, the editors introduce the concept of religious soft power and offer a brief history of the extent to which religion has featured in state

1 C. Hackett, M. Stonawski, Y. Tong, S. Kramer, A. Shi, and D. Fahmy. (2025). How the Global Religious Landscape Changed From 2010 to 2020. Pew Research Centre. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/bdek6uu>.

2 R. Muggah and A. Velshi. (2019). Religious violence is on the rise. What can faith-based communities do about it? World Economic Forum. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/sby9mhsf>.

foreign policy in the modern era, from the “secularizing set of historical events” that started with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 to the “global resurgence of religion” in the two decades following the 9/11 terror attacks (1). They consider the extent to which international relations (IR) theories have historically accommodated religion as a subject, the degree to which IR scholars have shown an interest in religion as a variable in the international arena, and the issues they have focused on.

Mandaville and Hoffman note that in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which saw increasing interest in the relationship between religion and international relations, scholars drew on Joseph Nye’s notion of soft power to conceptualize the relationship between religion and foreign policy. They expand on the notion of religious soft power and introduce the concept of “sharp power”³ as distinct from both soft and hard power. They also challenge Samuel Huntington’s thesis that conflict between distinct civilizations would characterize the post-Cold War era.

The book shows that religion can be used not only to influence positively, through attraction, but also negatively through manipulation, as in the cases of Russia’s use of Orthodoxy and China’s use of Buddhism. Another recent example that confirms the book’s approach is the framing among some American and Israeli leaders of the 2026 US-Israeli attack on Iran as a religious war.⁴

A contemporary reality that the book’s opening authors recognize, and that makes the publication relevant, is the fact that the liberal world order dominated by the West – particularly the United States – has begun to deteriorate, elevating the role and significance of religion as international actors seek answers, offer solutions and/or selfishly and unwisely pursue their interests in the face of complex global problems. Indeed, in the three years since this book was published, religion has grown in prominence as a geopolitical tool, not least because of the increasing prominence of Christian nationalism in the USA since Donald Trump’s second inauguration.

Beyond the introductory chapter, the book contains 12 case studies covering Christianity (United States, Holy See, Brazil, Russia), Buddhism (China), Hinduism (India), Judaism (Israel), and Islam (Turkey, Iran, Morocco, Indonesia, Jordan).

In addition to the 12 case studies, there is a chapter on the securitization of Islam and the accompanying conceptualization of “moderate Islam” among US security partners as a source of religious soft power. In the concluding chapter,

3 When foreign policy objectives are pursued through manipulation, rather than coercion (hard power) or attraction (soft power).

4 S. Shamim. (2026). Why are the US and Israel framing the ongoing conflict as a religious war? *Al-Jazeera*. 4 Mar. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yndsp2ef>.

the editors assess the book's contributions, its limits, and ways forward for the study of the geopolitics of religious soft power.

Rarely, if ever, do foreign policy formulation and execution with a religious dimension happen beyond the context of the domestic relationship between religious actors and the state. A revised edition of or a companion to this book could give more direct attention to the domestic religion-state relationship in each of the included case studies. Expanding the scope in this way would enhance understanding of who and/or what influences a state's foreign policy, since the governments themselves are not the only actors in this realm.

Notwithstanding the book's inclusion of Morocco as a case study – a country located in North Africa, but which has more in common with the Middle East – Africa is largely neglected. Most of the book's 40-plus references to the continent position Africa as a target or recipient of religious soft power initiatives and actions. The chapter on Iran could have discussed how Iran has targeted the African continent with religious soft power, but it does not.⁵ The failure to include a case study from sub-Saharan Africa, despite the region's large number of committed Christians, is also questionable. Africa is also an important epicentre of global terrorism.⁶ Is this omission of African case studies simply a gap in the book, or is there no example of a sub-Saharan country that uses religious soft power in its foreign policy? In either case, this gap could be addressed in a revised volume of this work.

Although this book may not be “the final word on the complex relationship between religion and power – soft or otherwise – in world politics,” it is “the most substantive contribution as of yet to an emerging, exciting, and promising research agenda on these issues” (281). Since religion will remain a prominent factor in the international affairs of states, this book is an essential read for anyone wanting to better understand states' foreign-policy behaviour.

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5 See S. S. Alibabalu and T. Sarkhanov. (2023). Iran's Public Diplomacy and Religious Soft Power in Africa, *Politics and Religion Journal*, 2/2023, XVII; S. Fröhlich. (2019). Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia build Africa mosques, *Deutsche Welle*. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/3fh4xntr>.

6 Hackett et al. (2025) How the Global Religious Landscape Changed From 2010 to 2020. Pew Research Centre. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/bdekc6uu>.; J. Marshall. (2018). The world's most committed Christians live in Africa, Latin America – and the U.S. Pew Research Center. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/4bc7k6nv>; C.N-E. Okereke and R. Gunaratna. (2025). Africa: The New Epicentre of Global Terrorism, in *Palgrave Handbook of Terrorism in Africa*, Okereke, C.N-E. & Gunaratna, R. (eds). Palgrave.

Guidelines for authors

This document combines essential elements of the editorial policy and the house style of IJRF which can be viewed on www.ijrf.org.

Aims of the journal

The IJRF aims to provide a platform for scholarly discourse on religious freedom in general and the persecution of Christians in particular. The term persecution is understood broadly and inclusively by the editors. The IJRF is an interdisciplinary, international, peer reviewed journal, serving the dissemination of new research on religious freedom and is envisaged to become a premier publishing location for research articles, documentation, book reviews, academic news and other relevant items on the issue.

Editorial policy

The editors welcome the submission of any contribution to the journal. All manuscripts submitted for publication are assessed by a panel of referees and the decision to publish is dependent on their reports. The IJRF subscribes to the Code of Best Practice in Scholarly Journal Publishing, Editing and Peer Review of 2018 (<https://sites.google.com/view/assaf-nsef-best-practice>) as well as the National Code of Best Practice in Editorial Discretion and Peer Review for South African Scholarly Journals (<http://tinyurl.com/NCBP-2008>) and the supplementary Guidelines for Best Practice of the Forum of Editors of Academic Law Journals in South Africa. As IJRF is listed on the South Africa Department of Higher Education and Training (DoHET) “Approved list of South African journals”, authors linked to South African universities can claim subsidies and are therefore charged page fees.

Submission addresses

- Book reviews or suggestion of books for review: bookreviews@iirf.global
- Noteworthy items and academic news: editor@iirf.global
- All other contributions: research or review articles and opinion pieces must be submitted online through the IJRF website: <https://ijrf.org/index.php/home/about/submissions>.

Selection criteria

All research articles are expected to conform to the following requirements, which authors should use as a checklist before submission:

- **Focus:** Does the article have a clear focus on religious freedom / religious persecution / suffering because of religious persecution? These terms are

understood broadly and inclusively by the editors of IJRF, but these terms clearly do not include everything.

- **Scholarly standard:** Is the scholarly standard of a research article acceptable? Does it contribute something substantially new to the debate?
- **Clarity of argument:** Is it well structured, including subheadings where appropriate?
- **Language usage:** Does it have the international reader, specialists and non-specialists in mind and avoid bias and parochialism?
- **Substantiation/Literature consulted:** Does the author consult sufficient and most current literature? Are claims thoroughly substantiated throughout and reference to sources and documentation made?

Submission procedure

1. Submissions must be complete (see no. 6), conform to the formal criteria (see no. 8-10) and must be accompanied by a cover letter (see no. 3-4).
2. The standard deadlines for the submission of academic articles are 1 February and 1 August respectively for the next issue and a month later for smaller items such as book reviews, noteworthy items, event reports, etc.
3. A statement whether an item is being submitted elsewhere or has been previously published must accompany the article.
4. Research articles will be sent to up to three independent referees. Authors are encouraged to submit the contact details of 4 potential referees with whom they have not recently co-published. The choice of referees is at the discretion of the editors. The referee process is an anonymous process. This means that you should not consult with or inform your referees at any point in the process. Your paper will be anonymized so that the referee does not know that you are the author. Upon receiving the reports from the referees, authors will be notified of the decision of the editorial committee, which may include a statement indicating changes or improvements that are required before publication. You will not be informed which referees were consulted and any feedback from them will be anonymized.
5. Should the article be accepted for publication, the author will be expected to submit a finalized electronic version of the article.
6. Include the following:
 - Articles should be submitted in Word and an abstract of no more than 100 words.
 - Between 3 and 10 keywords that express the key concepts used in the article.
 - Brief biographical details of the author in the first footnote, linked to the name of the author, indicating, among others, the institutional affiliation,

- special connection to the topic, choice of British or American English, date of submission, contact details including e-mail address, and the author's ORCID.
7. Authors are encouraged to also engage with prior relevant articles in IJRF, the Religious Freedom Series, and IIRF Reports (www.iirf.global) to an appropriate degree. So check for relevant articles.
 8. Articles should be spell-checked before submission, by using the spell-checker on the computer. Authors may choose either 'British English' or 'American English' but must be consistent. Indicate your choice in the first footnote.
 9. Number your headings (including introduction) and give them a hierarchical structure. Delete all double spaces and blank lines. Use as little formatting as possible and definitely no "hard formatting" such as extra spaces, tabs. Please do not use a template. All entries in the references and all footnotes end with a full stop. No blank spaces before a line break.
 10. Research articles should have an ideal length of 4,000-6,000 words. Articles longer than that may be published if, in the views of the referees, it makes an important contribution to religious freedom.
 11. Research articles are honoured with one complimentary printed copy.
 12. For research articles by members of the editorial team or their relatives, the full editorial discretion is delegated to a non-partisan editor and they are submitted to the same peer review process as all other articles.

Style requirements

1. IJRF prefers the widely accepted 'name-date' method (or Harvard system) for citations in the text. Other reference methods are permissible if they are fully consistent.
2. A publication is cited or referred to in the text by inserting the author's last name, year and page number(s) in parentheses, for example (Mbiti 1986:67-83).
3. Graphics and Tables: These must be attached as separate files. Indicate in red where they should go in the text. Every effort will be made to place them in that spot.
4. Image Quality: minimum width must be 10.5 cm at 220dpi or simply 1000 pixels. The width of the image always goes over the entire width of the type area (10.5cm), but is flexible in height. Please send the image in its own file (e.g. JPG, TIF, EPS), not in a Word document.
5. Tables and "simple" diagrams: These will likely be redesigned by our layout expert. Please attach them in a separate file.

6. Footnotes should be reserved for content notes only. Bibliographical information is cited in the text according to the Harvard method (see 2 above). Full citations should appear in the References at the end of the article (see below).
7. References should be listed in alphabetical order of authors under the heading “References” at the end of the text. Do not include a complete bibliography of all works consulted, only a list of references actually used in the text.
8. Always give full first names of authors in the list of references, as this simplifies the retrieval of entries in databases. Keep publisher names short.

Guidance for Graduate Students

International Institute for Religious Freedom

The International Institute for Religious Freedom can provide guidance for students who are writing a thesis or dissertation on a topic related to religious freedom. The IIRF can also assist with publication opportunities.

Please send a letter of interest to info@iirf.global.

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- Freedom of Religion or Belief: Thematic Reports of the UN Special Rapporteur 2010-2016. Heiner Bielefeldt. 2017.
- “Let there be no Compulsion in Religion” (Sura 2:256): Apostasy from Islam as Judged by Contemporary Islamic Theologians. Discourses on Apostasy, Religious Freedom, and Human Rights. Christine Schirrmacher. 2016.
- Grievous religious persecution: A conceptualisation of crimes against humanity of religious persecution. Werner N. Nel. 2021.
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- Human Rights – A Primer for Christians (Revised Edition). Thomas K. Johnson. 2016.
- Global Declarations on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Human Rights. Thomas K. Johnson, Thomas Schirrmacher, Christof Sauer (eds). 2017.

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