

Book reviews

Silenced: How apostasy and blasphemy codes are choking freedom worldwide

Paul Marshall, Nina Shea

Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011, 448 pp., ISBN 9780199812288, Pbk. US\$ 35.00, Hardcover US\$ 99.00.

The “think tank” of the Hudson Center for Religious Freedom in Washington (USA) has drawn attention to itself for years with solid professional publications on a large range of political themes, among them the themes of religious freedom, Islam, and Islamism. The present monograph is devoted to a subject that, on the whole, has been only seldom treated: apostasy and blasphemy, that is, the defection from Islam and blasphemy and its consequences. With this extensive study, Paul Marshall (Senior Fellow) and Nina Shea (Director of the Center for Religious Freedom at the Hudson Institute) offer a comprehensive insight into the realm of the, in part, extremely limited freedom of opinion and religion in Islamic-dominated states.

The focus of the study, however, is not the history of the theoretical framework, that is, an explanation of the regulations in Sharia law on the defection from Islam, or a description of the views of present-day Muslim theologians on the subject. The focus is much more on the practical effects of Islamic regulations regarding apostasy and blasphemy, as well as on the portrayal of the consequences for those who are charged with apostasy by others: To be sure, only in very few Islamic-dominated countries there exists a national law that forbids the defection from Islam, or makes it a punishable offence. One of the exceptions is, for example, North Sudan, whose criminal law provides for the death penalty in the case of apostasy. In contrast, some Islamic-dominated countries refer in their constitutions to the right of freedom of religion. But, the reference to religious freedom in the constitutions of Islamic countries means in practice merely that Muslims as well as non-Muslims are allowed to retain their religions, and non-Muslims may convert to Islam, but in no case that Muslims may leave their faith.

Why is this the case when there is no law against it? The reason for this lies in the fact that, according to unanimous opinion, the classical Sharia law developed up to the tenth century threatens the death penalty for defection from Islam. This is true for Sunni as well as Shiite criminal law. It is also true, though, that Sharia law is no longer valid in criminal law in most Islamic states, but rather still only in civil law. For this reason, too, it is hardly possible to bring an apostate to court and to convict him legally because of his defection from the faith. It is, nevertheless, pos-

sible in many countries to force the compulsory divorce of a husband converted to Christianity from his (Muslim) wife, because the civil law is oriented on Sharia law and does not allow a marriage of a non-Muslim with a Muslim woman. It is also possible to disinherit him as a non-Muslim and to take his children away from him. In addition, it is a social reality in many parts of the Islamic world that people who leave Islam are molested, discriminated against, and, in some cases, persecuted or even killed in broad daylight, or by their families, because numerous exponents of Islamic theology continue to preach in mosques and scholarly circles the obligation to execute the one who has fallen away from Islam.

The study by Marshall and Shea is divided into three parts: The first part consists of a survey of those parts of the Islamic world in which the problem of apostasy is significant, and of the ways in which it has an effect in those parts. Some countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, Egypt, and Pakistan, are presented separately; the human rights situation for minorities and dissidents in these countries is also explained. The emphasis here is not only upon individual persons who turn their backs on Islam, but also upon entire groups, such as the post-Koranic communities of the Bahai or the Ahmaddiya, which are considered per se as heretics and infidels and, in countries like Iran, possess no right at all to exist.

The second part presents the attempts of Islamic institutions such as the OIC (Organization of the Islamic Conference) to portray any kind of critical reporting about Islam as a violation of human rights and, on the basis of the supposed "human right" of the immunity of Islam to critical reporting, to demand the protection of the religious feelings of Muslims on the social as well as the political level. These explanations are supplemented by the discussion of Islamic organizations that, through various channels, attempt to mount pressure in Western countries which would muzzle any critical opinion about Islam. Organized protests, whipped up by Islamic groups because of Danish Muhammad caricatures, and the legal opinion (fatwa) pronounced by the former Iranian ruler Ruhollah Chomeini on Salman Rushdie containing a death sentence against Rushdie fall into this category. Marshall and Shea urgently warn Western countries against being impressed by these deliberate attempts at intimidation on the part of Islamic or Islamistic personalities and organizations, and against yielding to this pressure in the opinion that they could get rid of the pressure in this way.

The third and last part of the study contains two models by Muslim theologians for moderating the classic Islamic texts from the Koran and the tradition on the theme of apostasy: The first comes from the well-known Egyptian Koran scholar Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid who, because of his moderate historical-critical reflection upon the Koran in the mid-1990s in Egypt, was persecuted and had charges brought against him; the second is from the professor for Islamic studies from the Maldive Islands, Abdullah Saeed, who rejects any justification for Islam to persecute

dissidents and apostates, and who justifies this rejection by citing the Koran and the tradition.

The extensive study by Marshall and Shea is supplemented by numerous examples of accusations of apostasy or blasphemy that illustrate for the reader all the implications and drama of the subject and that show him or her how precious our freedoms are, most especially the freedom of religion. There is, for example, the young Ismailite Shi'ite who, in Saudi Arabia in 2002, was stopped by the religious police because he had listened to music in his car. In response to the question why he was not listening to recitations from the Koran, he answered that that was too boring to him. He was subsequently sentenced to eight years in prison and two thousand lashes because of slander of the Koran. Or, there is also the torn copy of the Koran that was found in 1997 in a mosque in Pakistan about a mile from a predominantly Christian village, whereupon an angry mob incited by clerics stormed the village and burned down 326 houses and fourteen churches, kidnapped seventy people (among them young women and girls), raped several and forcibly married them to Muslim men.

The struggle for sovereignty in the interpretation of Islam, which already is being carried out energetically via the media in Europe by Islamic organizations, certainly will intensify further in the future. It is time that the debate about the boundaries of a reasonable critique of religions and their advocates on the one side, and about the social good of a hard-won freedom of opinion and the press that needs to be preserved on the other, be taken up courageously by decision-makers and discussed widely in society.

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Censored: How European “hate speech” laws are threatening freedom of speech

Paul Coleman

Vienna: Kairos Publications, 2012, 164p., ISBN: 978-3-9503055-6-2, €9.90/US\$ 13.25.

“When should freedom of speech be limited in a free society?” (p. 3). As the author notes, the answer to this question is far from easy. However, while some limitations on speech will always exist, ill-conceived hate speech laws enforced through penal law should never be considered to be a valid restriction on speech. This is the view taken by Coleman as he considers hate speech laws in the European context.

Censored is divided into two parts, with Part One outlining the various problems with hate speech laws and Part Two reproducing the laws themselves, translated

into English where necessary. During Part One, Coleman approaches the issue of hate speech from three different perspectives: the history of hate speech laws, their present day application and their possible future.

In outlining the history of hate speech laws, Coleman guides the reader through the drafting stages of various international human rights treaties which followed the Second World War, noting that it was the communist led nations which were the driving force behind the internationalisation of hate speech provisions. As he notes, “despite the eventual collapse of communism in Europe, the notion that the state must be empowered to censor speech through the criminal law spread throughout the whole of Europe – filtering down from the international provisions and into domestic legislation” (p. 27).

Coleman then turns from the past to the present day in his review of the use of hate speech legislation, documenting over 30 hate speech cases from 15 different countries across Europe. In outlining the cases, he asks the reader to consider the crux of the matter: “Where does the greater risk lie, in allowing citizens to speak controversially and offensively, or in allowing the state to censor what it considers to be controversial and offensive?” (p. 34).

In the final section, Coleman considers the future of Europe’s hate speech laws. He makes several predictions based on Europe’s current trajectory, concluding that if things continue, “the scope of ‘hate speech’ laws will be further expanded and more speech will be regulated and censored ... so that ‘controversial’ views are only allowed in highly limited circumstances” (p. 70-1). However, Coleman also presents an alternative future, one in which freedom of speech is truly protected, and he concludes with a summary of rulings on speech restrictions in the US Supreme Court, commenting that “while the US began the 20th century with a censorship approach, it ended the century with a truly liberal one” (p. 83).

The layout and format of the book is clearly designed to engage readers on a popular level as well as those already in the field. Therefore, in constructing his case against hate speech laws, the author relies less on formal academic arguments and more on presenting actual hate speech laws and cases themselves for the reader to assess. *Res ipsa loquitur* could be the maxim of the book, and while it is a brief contribution to the hate speech debate, Coleman makes a compelling case against the use of hate speech laws by allowing the facts to speak for themselves.

Professor Ján Mazák, PhD, former Advocate General of the Court of Justice of the European Union and former President of the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic

Living together with disagreement: Pluralism, the secular, and the fair treatment of beliefs in law today

Iain T. Benson

Ballan, Australia: Connor Court Publishing, 2012, 53 p., ISBN: 9781921421709, (pbk.), Aus\$ 14.95.

Words matter; definitions are important. And this is especially true with regard to the global discussion of freedom of religion and the role of religions within societies. Iain T. Benson has offered definitions which, though rooted primarily in his thoughtful critique of legal developments within multi-cultural Canada, hold promise for reasonable solutions on the international level. In this little book Benson offers thoughtful definitions of a small number of words which are crucial for the discussion of how religion and the state should be related in decisions coming from the courts: secular, secularism, pluralism, religion, belief, and conduct. Some can be summarized.

What does “pluralism” mean? Benson notes that pluralism is often taken to mean a kind of relativism in which moral positions cannot have any public validity, but a much better understanding of pluralism has been offered by the representatives of “structural pluralism” such as James Skillen. In this definition pluralism means a just society is one in which multiple (plural) institutions representing diverse spheres of experience function together in freedom under the protection of law. From this flows an understanding of religious freedom to mean that a just government will provide equal public protection to multiple (plural) faiths and faith communities. This is pluralism that is neither relativistic nor inclined toward totalitarianism, and which is not opposed to the important role of religious communities within pluralistic societies.

What does “secular” mean? Benson notes that “secular” has too often been defined as “free from religion” under the influence of atheistically driven secularism in western society, so that atheistic or agnostic beliefs are given a privileged status in secular societies. But if religion or belief is a normal part of human life (of which atheistic belief is one example), “secular” and “religious” refer to different human functions, not to competing worldviews, so that within a properly secular society moral convictions arising from traditional religious beliefs have a place in public discussion just as much as moral convictions arising from atheism have a place in public discussion. Within this better definition, a secular state is not anti-religious nor will it promote atheism. A secular state will simply restrict its activities to the

properly non-sacred dimensions of life, while recognizing that public moral discussion in a civil society will always be influenced by plural religions and worldviews.

Benson points out that the use of better definitions has begun in legal rulings within Canada, but that the use of these better definitions is still inconsistent and contested. In some other countries these better definitions have yet to be introduced, which is why his book is a worthy contribution to global freedom of religion.

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Religious Freedom: Why Now? Defending an Embattled Human Right

Timothy Samuel Shah, principal author; Matthew J. Franck, editor-in-chief; and Thomas F. Farr, chairman of The Witherspoon Task Force on International Religious Freedom, with contributions by David Novak, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and Abdullah Saeed

Princeton, NJ: The Witherspoon Institute, 2012, 86 p., (pbk), ISBN: 978-0-9814911-9-6, US\$ 9.95.

This is a very important book which summarizes and analyses some of the deepest and most urgent matters of public and religious life. It is the result of a two day meeting in May 2011, in which 30 experts with a wide range of academic disciplines and professional experience from a variety of religious traditions discussed the basis, condition, importance, and future of religious freedom. Everyone teaching civics, social studies, religion, or ethics at the secondary or university level should read it, as well as people in the foreign service of their countries and religious leaders.

Four themes are central to the argument of the book:

(1) Religion, in the sense of the effort of individuals and communities to understand, express, and seek harmony with a transcendent reality, is central to human experience, so that the suppression of religious belief, expression, or practice runs against the grain of human nature and experience. Because of the centrality of religion to being human, coercion in the realm of religion is an assault on human dignity. This means that protecting freedom of religion is a universal demand of justice and not merely the demand of a particular nation or culture.

(2) In society, religious freedom is bundled or closely interconnected with several other freedoms, such as the freedoms of speech, assembly, and the press, which together contribute very significantly to human well-being and societal flourishing. Religious freedom contributes to security, stability, prosperity, and the equality of women, along with other social, political, and economic goods. Religious repression tends to foster violence, tyranny, instability, economic stagnation, and female oppression. Any state or culture that coerces the consciences of its members in religious matters invites the hostility and alienation of those it is coercing, prompting a long term process of self-destruction. The journey from conflict to peaceful competition among faiths is the only way forward for societies that seek stability, prosperity, and a flourishing civil society.

(3) There are very significant legal protections of freedom of religion, some of which were articulated early in American history in US state constitutions and then in the US Bill of Rights (First Amendment), which were enshrined internationally during the twentieth century by the United Nations in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966), and the *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief* (1981). These or similar legal guarantees of freedom of religion now cover, in principle, more than 90% of the world's population.

(4) The gap between law and reality is stark and is creating a humanitarian crisis of the first order. In practice, a worldwide erosion of religious liberty is causing large scale human suffering, grave injustice, and significant threats to international peace and security. In 2009, the Pew Research Center reported that "nearly 70% of the world's 6.8 billion people live in countries with high restrictions on religion." And the following study in 2011 showed that the problem was getting worse, that restrictions on the freedom of religion are growing. This restriction on freedom of religion is one of the important contributing factors to growing religious extremism and violence on a global level. Conversely, freedom of religion frequently tends to reduce or pre-empt a religious movement's violent tendencies because the movement is socially forced to defend its ideas of justice, freedom, equality, and the common good in the free market place of ideas.

From this analysis, the task force, obviously based in the US, developed a long list of recommendations, many of which are oriented to particular steps the US government should take to more effectively make freedom of religion a diplomatic and foreign policy priority. Similar steps could and should be taken by other national governments and the European Union. Additionally they encourage the world's religious bodies to work more closely to identify global threats to freedom of religion and to forge common responses (a central task of this journal on behalf of evangelicals). And poignantly they observe that culture drives politics, meaning that the values, assumptions, and convictions of a people can eventually shape the actions

of their government. It is for this reason that I have so strongly recommended that educators and religious leaders read and use this book in their efforts.

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Religion and the Global Politics of Human Rights

Thomas Banchoff and Robert Wuthnow (eds.)

New York: Oxford UP, 2011, 324 p., ISBN 978-0-19-534338-0, US\$29.95.

The book argues that democratization of Africa, Latin American and Asia has empowered religious groups to participate freely on matters of human rights in their particular social and political contexts. However, these religious groups often face resistance from the “state” and from “other social actors.” Nevertheless, in recent decades religion and the global politics of human rights have become bedfellows. Most scholars agree that religion and human rights needs each other.

The editors divide the book into four sections. The first is the Introduction, which has two chapters. Part I looks at Islam and the global politics of human rights. This part has two chapters. The chapters address issues of human rights, democracy, using Indonesia as a case study; they address Muslims, human rights, and women’s rights in Islam. Part II focuses on three regions: Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. This section has three chapters that deal with matters ranging from religious pluralism, democracy, human rights, gender justice, religion, human rights in Buddhism and minority rights in these regions. Part III looks at four key countries: India, China, Russia and the United States. The four chapters in this part deal with the politics of rights in India, religion, state power and human rights in China, religious communities and rights in the Russian Federation, and Human rights, the Catholic Church and the death penalty in the United States.

The book explores religious and faith communities’ efforts to address and to promote human rights agendas across the globe. The key human rights issues addressed include cases of religious persecution, intolerance, rights of minorities in Latin America, and Asia, of female genital mutilation, gender injustices, and rights of women in Africa and capital punishment in the United States of America. Other issues discussed include human rights, women’s rights, religious liberty, right to life, and bodily integrity from the world’s major regions, political systems and faith traditions.

The book supports an “inclusive approach to the religious politics of human rights” by combining both religious and liberal understandings of the quality and

dignity of all human beings as productive and efficient ways of engaging in the global politics of human rights. The book advances the position of different patterns of practical involvement in the politics of human rights, within and across the countries and regions mentioned in the book. The authors conclude, “The scope and impact of religious engagement” of religious and liberal viewpoints “depend on the state and its structures as it does on the values and practices of the faith communities themselves” (p.7).

This is a well-written and edited volume by leading international scholars from different disciplines reflecting on the important place religion plays in matters of politics and human rights in different social and political contexts. The book is a must read for people who are interested in issues to do with human rights, religious liberty for minority groups and it is written from various religious, and secular viewpoints. The book would also be helpful to religious organizations working with non-faith organizations interested in the politics of global human rights as they address issues to do with human rights and religious freedom.

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The disenchantment of secular discourse

Steven D. Smith

Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard UP, 2010, 285 p., ISBN 978-0-674-05087-7, US\$ 27.00.

According to Steven Smith the transition to the modern world occurred when it came to be accepted that progress in knowledge would be enhanced by leaving behind the metaphysical (and theological) cosmos in favour of a world viewed as complete in its empirically observable dimension – “God, although not being denied, was to be excluded from scientific explanations, and later, from public political justifications” and consequently a “secular” worldview has come to dominate some areas of life – “It is the cage of secular discourse, within which public conversation and especially judicial and academic discourse occurs today”. The secular vocabulary within which public discourse is constrained to operate is, says Smith, insufficient to convey our full set of normative convictions. This makes the addressing of normative matters problematic, says Smith. He further comments that when we attempt to engage in reasoning about vital normative concerns, our performances turn out to be “a pretty shabby and unsatisfactory affair”. Life is, according to

Smith, still good, irrespective of this limitation pertaining to normative matters and the bad state of discourse. This leads one to the question as to how this is possible amidst such limitations to normative issues. According to Smith, “smuggling” assists in countering the adversity posed by such limitations; for example, where the concept of “freedom” or “equality” becomes an honourable label used to smuggle in an advocate’s particular conception of what is good and valuable. In other words, concepts such as “freedom” and “equality” turn out to be receptive vessels into which advocates can pour virtually any content they like, or that they can persuade others to follow. Another example is that of the “harm” principle, according to which liberals argue for their favoured positions on questions of individual freedom. The same also applies to applications of the concept of “human dignity” so as to “dress up different people’s earnest intuitions approving or disapproving some particular law or practice”. Smith expands on this by looking critically at the “secular subversion of religious freedom”. Here Smith comments that the modern liberal state is expected to operate on grounds that are “not religious”, where the sorts of theological and biblical arguments that once dominated discussion of the proper relations between church and state now seem inadmissible. Today the “problem of church and state” has become a problem to be resolved within the state’s secular jurisdiction and in secular terms which, needless to say, have crucial implications for the issues of “separation of church and state” and freedom of conscience. Smith then further illustrates this dilemma by referring to the “ministerial exception to employment discrimination laws against the background of the sex of a person”, where the language of “equality” and “neutrality” are applied so as to qualify a specific subjective approach which does not necessarily appreciate and accommodate religious views on the matter. The conclusion in all of this is that, according to Smith, public discourse is impoverished because the constraints of secular rationalism prevent us from openly presenting, examining, and debating the sources and substance of our most fundamental normative commitments, which in the end, results in the superficiality of discourse. Smith therefore calls for more openness to alternative possibilities – “We can call off the cultural border patrol agents who police the boundaries of discourse . . . to keep out would-be entrants who lack a certified secular passport”.

Steven Smith’s *The Disenchantment of Secular Discourse* is, in the context of public discourse, a criticism of the Enlightenment project and a confirmation of the Enlightenment delusion. The idealistic belief in the divinity of reason separated from theology and the transcendental has led to a superficiality and subjectivity of public discourse. Consequently, this has marginalised the deep layers of religious insights and participation on popular concepts such as human dignity, equality, harm and freedom as well as on important yet contentious moral matters such as obscenity

regulation, abortion, euthanasia, and prohibitions on membership to religious associations based on specific forms of sexual conduct. This work is undoubtedly of relevance to jurists, theologians, ethicists, philosophers and political theorists who advocate the inclusion of all beliefs in public discourse and activity.

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Believing in Russia – Religious Policy after Communism

Geraldine Fagan

London & New York: Routledge, 2012, 291 p., Hardcover ISBN 978-0-415-49002-3, e-book: 978-0-203-09537-9, US\$ 155.00.

In the area of research on the relationship between the state and churches in the post-Soviet space there is a deficit of books describing the more than twenty years old history of religious freedom as a whole. In fact, no such scholarly monographs have been ever published in Russia. The contribution of Geraldine Fagan is that she made an attempt to collect a practically immense material and present it as one history of how people believe in Russia. But it turned out a difficult task due to the paradoxes shaping the attitudes to faith in the post-communist space and the danger of presenting faith and religious situation in the country only on the basis of the human rights information.

One of the key achievements of the book is that it presents a rich factual material on the development of religious legislation in Russia up to 2009 (pp. 53-193). The most detailed description is given of the period from the late 1990s to the early 2000s, when a discussion was taking place on the Law on Freedom of Conscience of 1997 and its practical application (pp. 62-88). In addition to this, the monograph presents the most prominent cases of discrimination of believers in different regions of Russia, which include both Christians (Catholics, Baptists, Pentecostals, Evangelicals, Adventists, etc) and other religions, for example Muslims and also new religious movements (Scientologists, Jehovahs Witnesses). A separate paragraph is dedicated to the policy on combating extremism and the enforcement of anti-extremist legislation in Russia (pp. 155-171). Therefore, the material presented in the book helps to see the main manifestations of the religious policy of the Russian Federation during its formation – from Yeltsin to Medvedev and Putin.

However, the difficulty of the analysis of this situation is that the policy of the state in the sphere of religion, the wishes and actions of the local bureaucracy in the regions, the turn to the Soviet type ideology together with respect for the Orthodox

Christianity – are too diverse and contradictive. The manifestations of the religious policy are not well combined into a whole picture within the framework of the monograph, just like it is in the real life.

The history of freedom of religion and belief in the Russian Empire, the USSR and later in the modern Russia is interesting as a history of overcoming authoritarianism, including Orthodox and Soviet, and at present also a symbiosis of the Orthodoxy and the Soviet stereotypes, a combination of the oppressed position of religious minorities (Protestants, part of the Muslims and new religious movements) and the privileged position of the Russian Orthodox Church. However, in Fagan's book the historical excursions are presented as separate stories taken out of the context, often without considering the chronology (Chapter 1, pp. 6-23 is dedicated to the tradition of religious freedom, however, no chronology is taken into consideration in this chapter; for unknown reasons special attention is paid to Old Believers and Buddhists).

As the author notes, the first three chapters show the role of Orthodoxy and the privileges of the Russian Orthodox Church, its impact on politics and public opinion. In terms of content, it is difficult to make a distinction between chapters 2 (Native land protected by God) and 3 (Rites of spring), both chapters (pp. 24-68) speak about Orthodox Christianity, they briefly mention sociological studies, both federal and regional legislation are mentioned and also deal with the Law on Freedom of Conscience 1997, just like in the subsequent chapters.

The main chapters of the book (Chapters 4-8) describe the changes and the enforcement of the religious legislation in the 2000s. This part of the book is mostly descriptive, it lacks a clear structure and presents an analysis of the numerous stories narrated by the author. Because of the diversity of the facts it is difficult to understand the main concept of the author.

Geraldine Fagan approaches the material presentation from the position of a human rights activist who studied a multitude of sources (in the book, 90 out of 291 pages contain comments and references). The book is a combination of the dry journalistic narration of the facts of discrimination (repeating the style and manner of their presentation in the reports on the situation in Russia, which were prepared by a former representative of Keston Institute [Oxford, UK] in Moscow, Lawrence Uzzell, and in the articles of Keston News Service and Forum 18 written by G. Fagan and her colleagues) and the literary political essays.

In the conclusion (pp. 194-200), as well as in separate chapters, the monograph by G. Fagan specifies the paradoxes of the Russian situation in the post-Soviet time – first of all it is the dominant position of the Orthodox faith (and the ideology based on the support of Orthodoxy) in the society and among bureaucracy, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) as a symbol of identity, repressions of the religious

minorities, which are not as severe as in the Soviet period and are often expressed in ideological campaigns (especially against Jehovahs Witnesses, Scientologists, Pentecostals and some Muslim groups whose literature is considered extremist), which do not strengthen the ROC and do not decrease the influence of the others I.e. oppressed religious confessions. In the monograph claiming to present the situation of the believing Russia as a whole, the role and influence of the religious minorities is underestimated – for example, in many regions (Kaliningrad, part of Ural and the southern part of Russia, Siberia and the Russian Far East) the Protestant churches can be hardly called a "minority" because they represent an influential part of the civil society.

The author leaves it to the reader to make final conclusions and does not try making deep conceptual conclusions based on the mosaics of believing Russia under Putin. Fagan rather avoids answering by noting that the ruling elite is not much interested in the religious policy but more in supporting the stability and welfare of the country. The sphere of religion remains unregulated up to the degree to which it does not challenge the strategic interests of the elite (p. 195). In the book it is noted that among the top Kremlin bureaucracy there are those who support the secular model of the state and those who lobby the interests of the ROC. Fagan makes a conclusion that Russia did not turn into an Orthodox state and that the ROC is not so closely connected and interwoven with the state. However, the descriptions of the mass campaigns against those who believe differently, the outrageous cases of violations of freedom of conscience turn out to be contradictive to this conclusion or at least make it a spontaneous effort to explain a complicated situation. The representatives of the ROC participate in the majority of cases of persecution (likewise in the formation of the religious legislation), the Orthodox believers also take part in the anti-sectarian campaigns in mass media, and the policy and combating sects are motivated by Orthodox reasons. The author pays attention to the nebulous official rhetoric on «traditional religions», but the practice shows that it is not enough for an analysis of the real situation. Moreover, the formal documents of the ROC contradict both the joint position of the Kremlin and the ROC on combating the political opposition after elections 2011-2012, and the general policy of the authorities to approve practically all proposals of the ROC in 2009-2011. The patriarchate of Kirill changed the situation and made the religious policy more definite (although technically this period is also presented in the book, but in reality this presentation is small and its significance is rather omitted). However, at the end of her research the author still emphasizes that everything can change very quickly – “A Russian harnesses slowly but rides fast”.

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Coping with violence in the New Testament

Pieter G. R. De Villiers, Jan Willem van Henten (eds.)

Studies in Theology and Religion 16, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012, x+305 pp., cloth, ISBN 978-9-00422-1048, €99.00.

This collection of essays had its origin in a conference on violence in the New Testament held at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa. The authors are with one exception from South Africa and the Netherlands. They aim “to contribute to the recent scholarly debate about the interconnections between violence and monotheistic religions by analysing the role of violence in the NT as well as by offering some hermeneutical perspectives on violence as it is articulated in the earliest Christian writings” (ix).

The volume opens with two introductory essays by J. W. van Henten, “Religion, Bible and Violence” (3-21) and J. Punt, “Violence in the New Testament and the Roman Empire: Ambivalence, Othering, Agency” (23-39). The remainder of the volume consists of nine case studies: A. van Aarde, “Paul’s Version of ‘Turning the Other Cheek’: Rethinking Violence and Tolerance” (43-67); F. Tolmie, “Violence in the Letter to the Galatians?” (69-82); R. van Houwelingen, “A Godfighter Becomes a Fighter for God” (83-100); E. van Eck, “Jesus and Violence: An Ideological-Critical Reading of the Tenants in Mark 12:1-12 and Thomas 65” (101-131); W. J. C. Weren, “The Use of Violence in Punishing Adultery in Biblical Texts (Deuteronomy 22:13-29 and John 7:53-8:11)” (133-150); J. van der Watt & J. Kok, “Violence in a Gospel of Love” (151-183); P. B. Decock, “Images of War and Creation, of Violence and Non-Violence in the Revelation of John” (185-200); P. G. R. de Villiers, “Unmasking and Challenging Evil: Exegetical Perspectives on Violence in Revelation 18” (201-225) and T. Nicklas, “The Eschatological Battle according to the Book of Revelation: Perspectives on Revelation 19:11-21” (227-244). As an epilogue, P. G. R. de Villiers discusses the “Hermeneutical Perspectives on Violence in the New Testament” (247-273). The volume closes with bibliography (275-294) and indexes of passages and subjects.

Despite the wide range of topics that is covered, this volume does not address the dire violence which Jesus and his immediate followers experienced. The subject index does not contain “persecution” or “suffering”. Jesus, the apostles and countless other Christians had to suffer to a different degree for their convictions. One of the few areas where the ethics of Jesus are relatively detailed is precisely on how to deal with such animosity and overcome it in the Spirit of Christ. Like no other book in the New Testament, 1 Peter addresses suffering and offers strategies for coping (see now P. A. Holloway, *Coping with Prejudice: 1 Peter in Social-Psychological Perspective*, WUNT 244; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009). Perhaps it would have been wise to

include authors whose life experiences do not derive from contexts of generous religious freedom. This shortcoming is probably due to the recent focus on the relationships between monotheistic religions and violence and its (necessary) concentration on violence perpetrated by religions. However, even of that there is plenty in the New Testament. For a survey of the NT evidence regarding violence against Christians see Glenn M. Penner, *In the Shadow of the Cross: A Biblical Theology of Persecution and Discipleship* (Bartlesville: Living Sacrifice, 2004).

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Christian Zionism examined: A review of ideas on Israel, the church and the kingdom

Steven Paas

Nürnberg: VTR, 2012, 135 p., ISBN 978-3-941750-86-9, Euro 14.95.

There is a need for thoughtful books that probe the issues concerning Israel and the current Middle East conflict. Dr. Steven Paas contributes to this need in “Christian Zionism examined”. The book offers a poignant critique of the Christian Zionists movement. Paas cites Christian Zionism for excessive defense of the modern State of Israel and failure to present a balanced and biblical based theology.

Dr. Paas is not intent on examining a divergent theological view, but on rendering it inoperative. In Chapter 2, Paas unequivocally states that, “Christian Zionism is a consequence of erroneous methods of Bible reading” (15). Such expressions do not further Christian dialogue or build bridges to reconciliation.

Paas emphatically states throughout the book that the modern State of Israel is not linked to any millennial promise or biblical prophecy (37). This raises the question, what is the basis of the claims of the Jewish people to a national historic homeland? Embedded in the biblical claims of a Jewish homeland is the right of return by the Jewish people to the Land of Israel.

As Christian educators and leaders we must find a way to engage in dialogue concerning Israel, Palestinian and biblical truth. Christian Zionists for their part must find a way to include the rights and well being of Palestinians into an “end time” equation. This requires accepting the reality that God has allowed almost 2 million Palestinians to abide in the biblical land of Israel. Those Christians on the other side of the end time issue whether they are called amillennialists or super-

sessionists, must find a way to uphold the rights of the Jewish people to return to our ancient homeland after 2,000 years of exile and persecution.

As a Messianic Jew who has returned to the Land of my forefathers, these are not just theological issues or patriotic concerns but matters of self-preservation. For those of us who live in the land of Israel, whether Jew, Arabs, or Druze, the issues of right, homeland, security and justice are not academic but matters of our lives.

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Origenes. Aufforderung zum Martyrium

Eingeleitet und übersetzt von Maria-Barbara von Stritzky

Origenes: Werke in deutscher Übersetzung 22. Berlin: W. de Gruyter; Freiburg: Herder, 2010, 131 pp. Cloth, ISBN 978-3-11-020505-3, 978-3-451-32948-7, €60.00.

The present volume offers the Greek text and a fresh German translation of Origen's treatise on Christian martyrdom (best known under its Latin title *Exhortatio ad martyrium*). It is the first extant detailed treatment of martyrdom in the ancient church and has had a wide impact on subsequent notions of persecution, suffering and martyrdom. Although a number of English translations are available (e.g. Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer and Selected Works*, translated and introduced by R. A. Greer; New York 1979, 41-79), this German edition (part of a new comprehensive projected edition of the writings of Origen) is to be noted for its detailed and up-to-date introduction. In it the author discusses the title of the treatise, its literary genre as a *logos protreptikos* and its language and style. She addresses the occasion (the impending persecution of Christians under Roman emperor Maximianus), the time (235 AD) and place of writing (Caesarea in Palestine) and the addressees.

A further instructive section traces Origen's theology of martyrdom (11-25). Von Stritzky surveys the terminology involved and sketches Origen's understanding of martyrdom as a gift of divine grace, his distinction of two types of martyrdom (martyrdom in public and martyrdom in concealment which is known only to God). Origen further saw martyrdom as a struggle against demonic forces and as an expression of love of God and of the imitation of Christ. In addition, he understood martyrdom as a second baptism for the forgiveness of sins and described the positive outcomes of martyrdom for the martyrs. Martyrdom is understood as the highest level of assimilation to Christ. Martyrs who give their lives for Christ attain true and eternal salvation.

The Greek text in this volume is that of the edition of P. Koetschau, *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte* (GCS), Origenes 1, xix-xxii. Von Stritzky offers some comments in footnotes and notes all quotations from and allusions to Scripture in Origen's treatise. In this way it becomes clear to what extent Origen strove to develop a biblical theology of martyrdom. She lists translations of the treatise in major languages and secondary literature (115-19).

The introduction is most helpful in understanding how Origen, one of the most prolific authors of his day understood martyrdom and sought to prepare and encourage those likely to suffer martyrdom. While some of Origen's arguments require careful scrutiny, other aspects have rightly become the backbone of a Christian understanding of martyrdom and continue to deserve attention in developing a theology of martyrdom for the 21st century (a task that has hitherto been sadly neglected in the West). Origen's treatise also indicates that from the very beginning of post New Testament Christian reflection of martyrdom, something else was and is in mind, than the many deaths (religiously or otherwise motivated) that are referred to in many of today's media as "martyrdom".

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Allah: A Christian Response

Miroslav Volf

New York: Harper Collins, 2011, 336 p, ISBN 978-0061927089, US\$ 25.99.

Miroslav Volf is the son of a pentecostal preacher from a country that no longer exists, Yugoslavia. He has witnessed the destruction of his country through ethnic conflict and wars. Religion played an important role in these conflicts. Ever since, Volf is reflecting on issues of religion and conflict. He is currently professor at Yale Divinity School in the USA and can be considered an expert in this field.

Volf's search for reconciliation and peace is an important force behind his book *Allah, A Christian Response*. His thesis is, that Muslims and Christian should acknowledge that Allah and God are the same, if they ever want to live in peace with each other. With examples from history he shows how essential this is. Sometimes Christians looked for similarities and for what Christians and Muslims had in common, often they emphasized the differences. This immediately impacted relationships in society.

Volf searches for the connections. By summarizing the teachings of some great thinkers of Islam, like Al-Ghazali, he portrays an image of Islam that is much closer to Christianity than often thought. He does not ignore or erase the differences, but

also wants to be completely honest and fair about Islam, both with respect to the place of violence in Islam as supposed legalism.

Volf emphasizes that he fully subscribes to the truths of classical Christianity. When he says that Muslims and Christians ultimately speak about the same God, this does not imply for him that Islam and Christianity are basically identical or different expressions of the same divine mystery. Neither are they both valid ways of salvation. He is not speaking about 'salvific' knowledge of God, but about relevant knowledge of God for society. He does not develop a missionary vision, but a political.

It is fascinating what Volf is writing. He refuses any kind of simplistic or hostile stereotyping of Islam. He makes a theological effort of Jesus' commission to approach every enemy as a friend. His thesis, that we can only live in peace when we acknowledge that we worship the same God, for is limited. I think the challenge for Muslims and Christians is more to live in peace precisely when they disagree on certain issues, whether this concerns their view of God or of daily life as communities. That exactly is the crucial dilemma when relationships between Muslims and Christians worldwide are critical. How can both communities be loyal to their faith in God and to what God demands from them and still constructively work for peace in the world. That does not exclude recognition of basic things we have in common, but it creates more space to also include in the process the difficult aspects of the relation between Muslims and Christians. It can also help to continue discussing religious freedom and persecution, concerning Christians and Muslims.

Nevertheless, I think that *Allab, a Christian Response*, is a book that no leader in church or society can ignore. The issues it raises cannot be disregarded, they need to be discussed.

Prof. Dr. Bernhard Reitsma, Extraordinary Professor VU University Amsterdam for The Church in the context of Islam



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