Book Reviews

Christianity and Criminal Law

Edited by Mark Hill QC, Norman Doe, RH Helmholz, and John Witte Jr.

London and New York: Routledge 2020, 382 pp., ISBN 978-0367495787, US $180.00 hardback; $54.99 paperback; $49.49 eBook

This volume is part of a larger series exploring Christianity's interactions with distinct areas of jurisprudence such as human rights, family law, and natural law. The book is organized into four sections: (1) the connected history of Christianity and criminal law; (2) Christianity's interactions with principles of criminal law; (3) Christianity's relationship with specific criminal offences; and (4) Christian perspectives on criminal law enforcement. Contributors represent a range of professional backgrounds; in addition to legal scholars, at least one of whom is also a Christian minister, authors include a parole board member and a practicing lawyer.

The volume's essays cover much thematic ground. The historical section summarizes Christianity's engagement with criminal law from biblical times through the Enlightenment. The treatment of that later period by Heikki Pihlajamäki rebuts common characterizations of the era as mainly secular. Other chapters address church disciplinary practices and the role of criminal law in Christian theological reflection, such as in Brent A. Strawn's essay on law and procedure in the story of Adam and Eve. Complications in criminal law jurisdiction over Christians in pagan antiquity and then within Christendom are examined by Markus Bockmuehl and RH Helmholz, respectively.

Against this historical backdrop, tensions around conscience, responsibility, mercy, justice, dignity, and social order emerge as persistent themes. The volume opens with a provocative essay by Lord Judge, the aptly named former Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales, who ponders what the future will hold for Christianity and criminal law. After all, religion is increasingly privatized and public life is increasingly secularized. Contributions in the last three sections respond to Lord Judge's question in different keys. For example, what is the understanding of culpability in a society with a post-Christian sense of sin – if there is any sense of it at all? David McIlroy's essay on mens rea identifies Christianity as the historical source for punishment based only on "voluntary acts committed with a guilty mind" by a specific individual (132). Does the displacement of the social ideal of the Kingdom of God lead to statism? Nathan Chapman suggests that Christianity lent societies "ambivalence towards the State's authority" that "has inspired both expansions of and

limitations to the State's legitimate exercise of power to punish crimes against the State" (154). Can due process survive post-Christian changes in the idea of human dignity? Peter Collier finds happy convergences between secular and Christian histories and philosophies of these concepts. Does Christianity compel human solidarity with criminals and non-judgmentalism? Jeffrie G. Murphy says the faith deals more with attitudes toward punishment than its permissibility per se, but Albert W. Alschuler wrestles with the possibility that Jesus "may have opposed criminal punishment altogether" (300) – positions with serious implications for Christian participation in the debate around prison abolitionism.

As deep as the volume is philosophically, its scope is still limited. It focuses almost exclusively on Northern Europe and the United States, apart from Daniel Philpott's essay on modern transitional justice and Norman Doe's references to modern Orthodox canon law. None of the authors come from Hispanic, French, or Italian backgrounds. Only one essayist, Chloë Kennedy, is a woman, though her assessment of the criminalization of sado-masochistic erotic acts is certainly eye-catching. There are no discussions of the historical Christian East or of Christian imperialism's reshaping of African, Asian, Latin American, or Oceanian criminal law. Likewise omitted are questions of crimes against the environment and animals. In short, real-world history is beyond the book's range – pagan persecutions of Christians (and vice versa), inquisitions, and burnings of heretics and witches are occasionally cited but do not take center stage.

Of particular note for this publication's readers, contemporary issues of criminal law and religious freedom appear only in Jeroen Temperman's discussion of modern blasphemy laws. Church sex-abuse scandals, litigation over the secrecy of Catholic confessions, and radical Christian groups' conflicts with criminal laws are not addressed in detail.

These omissions define the book's position more than undermining its project. The volume is a lively introduction to intellectual connections between Christianity and the criminal law of Northern Europe and the United States. Readers will gain a solid conceptual foundation on the relationship between Christianity and criminal law.

Stylistically, the volume features visually appealing typography and page layouts. One minor quibble: biographical information on the authors appears only at the start of the volume, rather than at the beginning of each essay.

Quoting Jesus Christ, volume editor John Witte Jr. (my colleague and mentor) would call the issues raised here "weightier matters of the law." This book makes it a little easier to bear them intelligently.

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When Christians Face Persecution: Theological Perspectives from the New Testament

Chee-Chiew Lee

London: Apollos, 2022, 224 pp., ISBN: 978-178974268, US $22.99

When a weaver produces a scarf or blouse from divergent threads, he or she may pull 50 or more unique threads together to weave a single pattern just a few inches long. This multivariant thread-pulling provides an apt illustration for Lee's strategy.

Lee, associate professor of New Testament at Singapore Bible College, has drawn on her New Testament expertise to produce a helpfully novel overview of the persecution of Christians in the first century. The strategy of focusing phenomenologically on the reception and response of first-century Christians sets her project apart from the extant literature on persecution.

Lee makes many useful distinctions in this work. For example, she emphasizes that not all opposition to Christians constitutes persecution, unless "it can be established that unjust treatment results from the opposition" (21). For Lee, persecution refers to "the unjust treatment meted out to people due to their faith in Jesus Christ as their God, and their Lord and Saviour" (21). This definition maintains a connection to both the long Catholic tradition of odium fidei (hatred of the faith) and the Protestant emphasis on justice.

Persecution by definition is unjust. But for Lee, the concept of justice here is perspectival. In her words, "What may be perceived as 'unjust' by the persecuted may be deemed 'just' for the persecutor. Therefore, as this study seeks to describe the New Testament authors' view, I will adopt the perspective of the persecuted" (21).

While leaving open the question of whether one definition of justice can be considered correct or authoritative, Lee consistently models a strategy of maximum "thread collecting." She develops a richly descriptive account, leaving prescriptions and syntheses to the conclusion. In her effort to aid the greater evangelical goal of seeing the full tapestry of persecution and its influence on Christian faith, Lee allows the texts and the characters contained therein to speak for themselves, without instinctively rushing to theological unity. The narratives of Acts, Luke, John, and Revelation present a unique and colorful array of persecution encounters and responses.

Lee notes the tension in her approach and hopes to balance unity and diversity in a manner similar to the method followed by James D. G. Dunn in his New Testament Theology (25). Her quest for various responses to persecutions opens up the potential for seeing "theologies" in the different texts, contexts, and authors of the New Testament, while still allowing evangelical Christians to emphasize the unity of the New Testament in its message in response to those who claim otherwise (24).

After establishing her working definition and clarifying her methodology, Lee examines the various New Testament threads of persecution in three parts: the reasons for persecution, the responses to persecution, and the overall message of perseverance in persecution. With regard to the first thread, she offers a helpful view of the first-century Greco-Roman world, with a particular emphasis on the religious nature of cultic practices. The gods and religious practices were almost utilitarian. Opposing such practical approaches to life was akin to being anti-human – a slur that was lobbed at Christians in the first century. In addition to the Greco-Roman worldview, other contextual reasons why Christians were persecuted include intensifying opposition from Jews and hostility from "Satanic opponents" (58ff.).

Along the second thread line, Lee demonstrates the real strength of her work, focusing specific attention on concrete responses to persecution throughout the New Testament. Relying heavily on Luke-Acts but also including Pauline and Johannine literature, Lee categorizes the first response as resistance and perseverance. She then moves to examples of responses that signal apostasy and assimilation. Here Lee leans on the Gospels and the book of Hebrews, particularly the strong admonitions against falling away. Finally, she characterizes the third group as accommodation and adaptation, starting with Peter as his story unfolds in the Synoptic Gospels.

The final thread of Lee's research involves placing together all the threads to formulate a New Testament pattern of responding to persecution. She sees perseverance as the predominant outcome, resulting from the reorientation of shame and honor around Christ; the righteousness and vengeance of God in the face of suffering; the faithfulness of God through suffering; and the empowerment of saints by the example of fellow believers who remained faithful through trials.

Overall, Lee's work is a welcome addition to the field of persecution study. Whereas other works lean toward conflation – perhaps too quickly encapsulating persecution episodes under various theological umbrellas such as righteousness[1] or character development[2] – Lee's work leans in a different direction. If anything, her strategy may lean toward inflation – that is, an emphasis on threads with a slight aversion to seeing an underlying theological pattern. Nevertheless, all these approaches are needed and desired as the New Testament cannot be understood rightly apart from recognizing the presence of persecution against Christ and his followers. Lee has produced a helpful overview of the many ways in which Christians suffered persecution in the New Testament.

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1 See Gregory C. Cochran, Christians in the Crosshairs: Persecution in the Bible and Around the World Today (Lexham Press, 2016).

2 Josef Ton, Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven (University Press of America, 2002).

Religious Conversion: Indian disputes and their European origins

Sarah Claerhout and Jakob de Roover

Abington: Routledge, 2022, 180 pp., ISBN 9781032113302, £108 (hardcover)

The question of religious conversion in the Indian subcontinent has long been a subject of intense debate. Its complexities, stemming from historical, social, and religious factors, have created a contentious landscape where conversion is often seen not merely as a personal spiritual choice but as a broader cultural and political act. Claerhout and De Roover venture into this fraught terrain, offering an analysis that blends historical insight with contemporary concerns. The book brings to light the fundamental tensions between different traditions in India, especially in their divergent views of what constitutes religious freedom.

One core strength of the book lies in its exploration of the historical underpinnings of these debates. Claerhout and De Roover argue that many modern Indian concerns about religious conversion are deeply rooted in Christian discourse, specifically Reformation theology. This claim sheds light on how Western and Indian conceptions of religion and conversion differ profoundly. In Western contexts, religion is often understood as a set of personal beliefs that can be changed or adopted relatively freely. However, in the Indian context, particularly within Hinduism, religion is deeply intertwined with cultural identity, social structure, and community belonging. Religious conversion in the Hindu context is, therefore, not merely a shift in belief but a potentially destabilizing act that can threaten the cohesion of the social order.

This tension is especially pronounced in Hindu responses to proselytism. For many Hindus, proselytism represents a form of aggression that could undermine the very survival of Hinduism. The authors illustrate this point by highlighting concerns that are particularly evident in the writings of Mahatma Gandhi, who is presented as the quintessential voice of Indian opposition to conversion. Gandhi viewed religious conversion as a form of violence that disrupted the harmony of Indian society.

However, one significant limitation of the book is its narrow focus on the perspectives of upper-caste Hindus, particularly those aligned with Vedic traditions. The authors' use of the term "Indian" seems to refer primarily to those who oppose conversion, largely ignoring the plural voices that exist within India. This is a crucial oversight, as the discourse on religious conversion in India is far from monolithic. Although Gandhi's views are certainly influential, they do not represent the entirety of Indian thought on the subject.

A glaring omission in the book, except for a very brief account, is the absence of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, a towering figure in Indian history who articulated a powerful argument in favor of religious conversion, particularly for Dalits (formerly known as untouchables). For Ambedkar, conversion was not just a matter of personal belief; it was a necessary means of escaping the oppressive caste system that was deeply entrenched in Hindu society. Ambedkar famously declared that for Dalits, conversion was as important as national independence was for India. His view provides a stark contrast to Gandhi's, and his omission from the book weakens its claim to represent the full range of Indian disputes over conversion.

Ambedkar's perspective also highlights another key issue that the book does not sufficiently address: the socio-economic dimensions of conversion. Claerhout and De Roover focus primarily on religious and philosophical arguments and do not engage with the material realities that often drive individuals to convert. For many Dalits, conversion to Buddhism, Christianity, or Islam is not only a spiritual decision but also a way to escape the social and economic marginalization imposed by the caste system. The book also neglects the arguments of proponents of religious conversion, who contend that opposition to conversion serves as a mechanism of social control, aimed at preserving the hierarchical caste system. This critique is particularly relevant in the context of Ambedkar's arguments, as he saw the upper-caste resistance to conversion as an attempt to prevent Dalits from achieving social mobility and equality.

While the book offers a compelling critique of the role of Christian discourse in shaping Indian debates on conversion, it also risks oversimplifying the issue. By suggesting that earlier debates about religious conversions have aligned with Christian interests, the authors imply that Indian opposition to conversion is merely a reaction to Christian proselytism. While this claim may hold some truth, it fails to capture the complexity of the issue.

Religious Conversion: Indian Disputes and Their European Origins is a valuable contribution to the study of religious conversion in India. Its examination of historical and philosophical roots of the debate is insightful, and its critique of the role of Christian discourse in shaping these debates is thought-provoking. However, the book's narrow focus on upper-caste Hindu perspectives and its failure to engage with the views of marginalized communities, particularly Dalits, limit its scope. A more comprehensive analysis that includes the voices of figures like Ambedkar and considers the socio-economic dimensions of conversion would have strengthened the book's argument.

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Religious Pluralism and Law in Contemporary Brazil

Paula Montero, Camila Nicácio, and Henrique Fernandes Antunes (eds.)

Cham: Springer Nature, 2023, 240 pp., ISBN: 978-3031419805, US $122.66 (hardcover)

This comprehensive work delves into the complex relations between religion and law in contemporary Brazil. Part of the "Law and Religion in a Global Context" book series, it addresses minority rights, religious freedom, secularism, and the human rights language through which religious debates are articulated.

Each chapter presents case studies illustrating the intricate interactions between religious groups, legal institutions, and society at large. From the outset, the editors set the tone for the discussion by framing it within the context of Brazil's 1988 Constitution, which formalized pluralism as a constitutional principle. The authors argue that this legal framework has created significant tensions between the traditional notion of secularism and the emerging demands for religious freedom and tolerance. This tension is explored from various perspectives, including legal disputes over religious education in public schools, the role of evangelical jurists in shaping human rights discourse, and documentation of religious intolerance in police records.

A central theme of the book is the ongoing debate on the role of religion in the public sphere, especially in legal and educational systems. The chapter "Religion and Laicity in Dispute: Two Categories Under Construction in Brazil's Legal Debate on Religious Education in Public Schools" provides a detailed analysis of legal controversies surrounding religious education in public schools. The authors trace the historical evolution of this debate and highlight how the 1988 Constitution's recognition of pluralism has reshaped the discourse, creating new challenges to balance religious freedom with the secular nature of the state.

Another chapter analyzes the National Association of Evangelical Jurists (ANAJURE), which mobilizes the Brazilian legal system to promote religious freedom from an evangelical perspective, constructing legal strategies to protect its beliefs while challenging progressive agendas such as attempts to criminalize homophobia. This chapter underscores the growing political power of evangelical groups in Brazil and their impact on shaping the legal landscape.

Another chapter addresses tensions surrounding the patrimonialization of religious practices, such as the religious use of ayahuasca. It demonstrates how these traditions, especially in Indigenous and Afro-Brazilian contexts, are simultaneously recognized as expressions of cultural rights and cultural heritage. This formal recognition has profound implications, challenging the state to balance

cultural preservation with the regulation of rituals involving psychoactive substances, and to address aspects of safety and respect for community autonomy. The author concludes by suggesting that the patrimonialization of ayahuasca goes beyond cultural protection; it legitimizes and integrates these practices within the Brazilian legal framework, reinforcing the value of these traditions in the context of the country's religious and cultural pluralism.

The book reveals the dynamism and complexity of religious pluralism in contemporary Brazil, where the 1988 Constitution has opened up a space for debates on religious freedom, inclusion, and tolerance in a distinctly diverse setting. The case studies provide a broad view of how law becomes a tool of negotiation and dispute among different social and religious groups, revealing the multiple strategies mobilized by these groups to defend their beliefs and rights in the public arena.

Although the book offers a valuable analysis of minority rights and inclusion in the religious context, it could have explored more intensely the importance of protecting the freedom of moral self-determination and doctrinal self-definition of religious denominations. By focusing on inclusion and minority rights, the work somewhat sidelines the question of how to ensure that inclusion coexists with the right of religions to preserve their core beliefs and practices. The absence of a more detailed analysis of this issue leaves a significant gap regarding the challenges of pluralism, which involves balancing respect for individual freedoms with the autonomy of religious traditions.

Nevertheless, the collection successfully documents the transformations of the religious field in Brazil and challenges the reader to reflect on the role of legal institutions and public policies in protecting diversity and mediating religious conflicts. Religious Pluralism and Law in Contemporary Brazil is an essential work for understanding the limits and possibilities of pluralism and secularism in a pluralistic society. It is relevant not only to scholars of law and religion but also to anyone interested in understanding the challenges of building a society that genuinely embraces diversity in its multiple expressions.

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Islam, Religious Liberty and Constitutionalism in Europe

Mark Hill KC and Lina Papadopoulou (eds.)

Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2024, 281 pp., ISBN 978-1509966950, US $130

This anthology provides a comprehensive summary of the 31st Annual Conference of the European Consortium for Church and State Research (held at Thessaloniki, Greece in September 2021). Hill is a London lawyer specializing in religious

liberty; Papadopoulou is an associate professor of constitutional law at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

In 19 contributions, the 20 academics from varying backgrounds address a range of topics related to the subject of religious freedom for Muslims in European countries, including the interconnection between European values and Islam, as well as the phenomenon of Islamophobia in Europe. Furthermore, they address related topics such as populism and xenophobia, as well as the social integration of Muslim minors, religious liberty, and the foreign funding of Islam. Additionally, human rights concerns and female religious practice in Islam are explored.

As the Muslim population in Europe is expected to continue growing, from 6 percent today to a projected 8 percent in 2030, in the context of a rising secularism in Europe, controversies over how Muslims practice their faith are present in most European countries. One topic addressed in this anthology is the perception of human rights in Islam, as opposed to Christianity and Judaism. For some, the two perspectives are not appreciably different from one another. For others, constitutionalism in Europe is a specifically Christian heritage, whereas for others it is a sign of Christian bias, which often coincides with discrimination against minorities, particularly Islam.

In his chapter, Maurits S. Berger posits that the notion of European values being "clear" is a misperception, as they are not synonymous with human rights. Nevertheless, these values are safeguarded by human rights. Five areas of discussion arise in this context: secularism, the Islamic headscarf, the burqa, Islamic Sharia, and Sharia courts in some European countries. Berger concludes that there is a discernible bias against Islam, which gives rise to double standards in Europe and a tendency towards an us-versus-them mentality. To achieve a long-term equilibrium between opposing values, he proposes that tolerance is the pivotal element, entailing a re-evaluation of the fundamental tenets underlying those values.

Samoa Bano focuses on the experiences of Muslim women in relation to religious practice: She delineates the manner in which female autonomy and choice were constrained in the past as scholars only concentrated on the "patriarchal nature of religion" (97). Bano highlights the need for female believers in Muslim communities in Europe to have equal access to justice.

In her contribution about Islamophobia, Papadopoulou elucidates why this topic is more pertinent than ever. A few decades ago, there were fewer Muslim communities in Europe and the influence of different social platforms on the World Wide Web had not begun. But now, religious diversity in Europe is undergoing significant changes as a result of the influence of second- and third-generation immigrants, as well as new migrants. Furthermore, Papadopoulou explains, the phenomenon of "neo-racism" in Europe is not limited to targeting individuals on the basis of their

race but also extends to those of a different religious affiliation. In particular, Islamophobia, especially in the media, has witnessed a notable surge. She defines Islamophobia as a form of racism targeting various markers of perceived Muslimness (212). In examining instances of Islamophobic discourse, Papadopoulou suggests a distinction between "official" anti-Muslim hate speech and rhetoric that incorporates anti-Islamic defamation elements, though the two can overlap.

The conference and the book were driven by a clear intention to facilitate the participation of Muslims in the discourse, thereby ensuring that their voice can be heard and that their experience will not be merely a topic of discussion by others. The book offers important insights on Islamophobia in Europe, a topic that is currently the subject of lively debate in many countries, particularly in Central Europe.

The editors deliberately omitted a concluding chapter to emphasize that there are no definitive answers to the issues discussed. Instead, they underscored the importance of striving for equal liberty and dignity for all.

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Religious Freedom and Populism: The Appropriation of a Human Right and How to Counter It

Bernd Hirschberger and Katja Voges (eds.)

Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2024, 268 pp., ISBN: 978-3839468272, €42.00, digital version is open access on the publisher website

Bernd Hirschberger and Katja Voges have edited a rich and thought-provoking volume on a burning issue that remains as timely as ever. The project is rooted in an online conference, "Religious Freedom and Populism," hosted in November 2022 by the German Commission for Justice and Peace and the Pontifical Mission Society missio Aachen. This background explains why the German-speaking world, where the main challenge is posed by the populist radical right party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), receives special attention. But these contributions are just a handful among a diverse collection of 19 chapters with impressive geographical, disciplinary, and analytical variety.

The regional focus on Europe is complemented by case studies on Brazil, the United States, Russia, Turkey and Lebanon. Disciplinary angles include political science, sociology, and communication studies as well as legal, historical, and some theological perspectives. The contributing scholars and practitioners analyze (the interplay between) numerous political, religious, and societal actors. This diversity of perspectives revolves more consistently around core aspects of

FoRB than other recent contributions on religion, populism, and right-wing ideology (e.g., Cremer 2023; Kitanović, Schnabel, and Caseiro 2023).

The volume's concern with populism centers on the demagogic use of simplistic and polarizing, yet purposefully ambivalent rhetoric through which far-right actors camouflage their anti-democratic intentions. More specifically, the authors elucidate how "populists and extremists" appropriate and reinterpret the universal human right of freedom of religion or belief as a political and strategic instrument for discriminatory, clientelistic, and ultimately power-seeking purposes. FoRB is claimed and promoted for one's own religious (or often rather cultural) community, while being weaponized against the liberties of other religions or beliefs. Combined with the estrangement of liberal and progressive forces from promoting FoRB, a polarizing vicious cycle of appropriation and withdrawal emerges in national settings, the European parliament, or intergovernmental and transnational networks.

The contributions in this volume offer clear empirical and normative perspectives on these often ambivalent, thorny issues. The book instructively debunks the practices, paradoxes, and perils of misusing FoRB for ideological, political, and potentially violent ends. Complex, contextually contingent cases such as the trajectory of the Russian Orthodox Church from Stalin to the Putin era or the recent rise of violent intolerance by certain Christian actors toward Afro-Brazilian religions are usefully deciphered for non-country experts. Other studies contrast the surprisingly secular and feminist Norwegian version of right-wing populism with the murders committed by extremist Anders Breivik, or discuss (in several contributions) how Islamophobia is politically weaponized in both Western states and Turkey. The reader even learns that Christof Sauer, the founder of this journal, had to protest against being nominated without his knowledge by AfD parliamentarians for the board of trustees of the German Institute for Human Rights.

Among the signs of hope and proposals for solutions highlighted in the volume are firsthand practitioner accounts of how the Adyan Foundation contextualizes and promotes FoRB in Lebanon, and how dedicated professional diplomats on both sides of the Atlantic worked diligently throughout cycles of populist and non-populist governmental leadership to establish the intergovernmental International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (now the Article 18 Alliance). The book closes with an entire toolbox of strategic recommendations for countering and dismantling problematic appropriations of FoRB as a human right.

Given the volume's title, the useful conceptual clarification of FoRB in a chapter by Heiner Bielefeldt could have been complemented by a similarly systematic conceptualization of populism. Rather than drawing on meanwhile established minimal definitions of populism from ideational, discursive, or political-strategic perspectives

in comparative politics, the volume operates with a looser menu of typical patterns of polarizing, demagogic, right-wing rhetoric. A flexible analytical perspective on 'populist' framing practices may be necessary to cover the diverse array of cases in this volume, but it has limitations with regard to providing a sharp conceptual grip on some of the studied phenomena (as acknowledged in the chapters on Brazil, France, and Denmark). The main discursive thrust of the FoRB appropriations analyzed throughout the book does not so much reflect populist 'people-versus-elite' antagonisms as far-right religious, cultural, sexual, and/or ethnic identity cleavages between 'members' and 'non-members' of an imagined national community. Most authors seem more worried about the substance of far-right ideological 'othering' than about the expression of populist 'anti-elitism.' In this sense, the volume could have benefitted from more intense dialogue with the burgeoning literature on religious nationalism (e.g., Perry, Schnabel, and Grubbs 2022; Saiya 2023).

The authors deserve credit not only for highlighting the threats far-right ideology poses to human rights and democracy, but also for repeatedly tackling the lukewarm embrace of FoRB by liberal and left-wing political forces. Many pieces can indeed be read as an effort "to break free from the prevalent stereotype that religious freedom is solely a right for the devout and conservative" (248). Despite an acknowledgment "that conservative policy-making is perfectly legitimate in the democratic space" (172), some pieces tend to inextricably subsume polarizing, Manichean discursive strategies and conservative policy stances on family values or abortion under 'populism' (e.g., the chapters on Hungary and the United States). Overall, the volume offers plentiful arguments as to why and how progressives should wholeheartedly embrace FoRB and anyone committed to democracy should counteract right-wing populists (and extremists). Less clear guidance is provided on the related question of how conservative, faith-based moral convictions could or should be articulated in a pluralistic, democratic spirit. Paradoxically, the unintended consequence might be preaching to the choir of progressive democrats while alienating conservative ones.

Future debates and research may address this point. One could also further integrate the book's primary focus on domestic politics (in mostly Western democratic settings) with potential policy solutions for effectively aiding persecuted believers in other regions and promoting FoRB worldwide. This volume questions Viktor Orbán's instrumental politicization of the Hungary Helps program before domestic and European audiences, but it does not discuss the actual aid provided to selected recipient communities outside Europe (61-64, 257). Other voices within the FoRB community, in turn, tend to foreground the latter without problematizing the former (Hodge 2024). Likewise, efforts to articulate a broad understanding of Christian persecution or publishing quantitative rankings could backfire in polarized domestic debates

(216-217, 254). Open Doors staff, for instance, do indeed express concerns about their cause being hijacked by populist radical right actors, but on the other hand, there is anecdotal evidence that its World Watch List may motivate at least some governments around the globe to deal with or even prevent FoRB violations (192; see also Petri 2022:83). Bringing both dimensions together would resonate with the editors' concluding call for extending research on FoRB and populism to India and other regions. Good candidates for studying how left-wing populism puts pressure on religious institutions and individual believers could be Nicaragua or Venezuela.

This book is a comprehensive and highly recommended resource for understanding and countering far-right (populist) challenges to FoRB.

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Who Lost America: Why the United States Went "Communist" and What to Do about It

Stephen Baskerville

London: Arktos, 2024, xxxv + 216 pp., ISBN 978-1915755674, US $29.95

Stephen Baskerville's new book promises to explain what he calls the "coup d'état" that he believes allowed the left to seize control of the United States government from about early 2020. Although detailed accounts of these events have

filled the public consciousness, Baskerville insists that none so far has explained them. His approach to the question is unique and compelling.

Baskerville spends less time recounting events or criticizing the left for what he sees as their illegitimate seizure of power and their policies than excoriating the "establishment right" (along with "the rest of us") for allowing it to happen. The underlying justification for this approach is that while the left is doing what is in its nature in its attempt to seize political power, the right shares a portion of the blame for its internal deficiencies that prevent it from acting effectively against this naked power grab.

Among the reasons Baskerville gives for the left's victory is the professionalization of politics – that is, citizens delegating their civic responsibilities to political professionals such as lobbies and law firms. Ironically, corporate special interests are less the villains than ideological groups claiming to speak for the broader "public interest." Although the left spearheaded this innovation, the right has imitated it.

A corollary trend is that churches have done something similar. They once played a vital role as civic institutions. Like individual citizens, for whose voices they provided organization and direction, churches were non-professional, at least when they spoke out on civic issues and abuses of government power. In fact, Baskerville suggests that religious sects in early America marked the beginning of America's unrivaled political pluralism and even constituted the first "pressure groups." Yet they too have now been superseded by professional versions, mostly operated by legal practitioners and think tanks. In fact, Baskerville surprisingly attributes the decline of the churches' civic involvement and political participation less to secularization and hostility from the secular-liberal left than to their "displacement" by conservative Christian advocacy firms.

Baskerville expresses admiration for the skills and effectiveness of professional lawyers and campaigners who labor to serve as substitutes for church involvement (though less for their organizational leaders), but he also suggests that they are fighting a losing battle by meeting the left on a battlefield of its choosing.

Conservative and Christian advocacy groups are outgunned, out-funded, and (more importantly) incredibly underrepresented in the judicial and media class. I know this personally from my 20 years of experience in international Christian advocacy.

Baskerville pushes this envelope further when he explicitly addresses the implications for religious freedom. In the days when churches were proactive civic leaders who concerned themselves with vital social issues – indeed, they were unapologetic political activists, unhesitant to speak out on public issues such as slavery and war – there was no need to advocate for religious freedom. Religious

freedom was a given because the churches had made themselves an immovable voice of change in culture.

Only when they had abdicated their civic involvement on broader social-political issues to professional lobbies did Christian churches find themselves defenseless against not only a general cultural secularization but also more aggressive intolerance from an organized left that, in the West, is increasingly hostile to Christian faith.

There are pragmatic but unconvincing reasons why the church has delegated its responsibilities to a professional class of campaigners. In the United States, some fear the Johnson amendment and its threat of the removal of tax-exempt status. Others worry that addressing controversial moral and political issues will offend their members and diminish their congregation's size or capacity for outreach. Whatever the case, the mass voice of believers and the voting base they represent has become ignored by policymakers and the political elite. Christian advocacy groups, on their own, can appear marginal and not representative of the views of the greater public. Baskerville cogently analyzes how, as a result, these same advocacy groups have lost ground and are forced to play on their back foot by defending their most basic right to share the playing field with the left as a religious freedom problem.

This line of discourse represents only one section of Baskerville's book, but it is typical of the kind of provocative, outside-the-box argument that runs throughout it.

Baskerville does not hide his conservative sympathies, but the book is far from a standard right-wing polemic. On the contrary, he criticizes the overproduction of just such right-wing rants and the organized right far more than he does the left. So readers of whatever ideological sympathy might gain a broad understanding of the overall dynamics at work.

This also prevents the book from being out-of-date. Though published last year, before Donald Trump's re-election, references to the "triumph of left" are still salutary, because these larger dynamics arguably still operate. Trump was not elected or supported by the "professional" right-wing leaders that Baskerville criticizes; arguably Trumpism arose precisely because of their failures not only to oppose the left effectively, but to address issues that affect ordinary citizens. If he is correct, failure by Trump and the MAGA Republicans to act more effectively could still bring consequences similar to what he seeks to explain here.

One need not agree with all of it to appreciate how the book forces us to rethink our basic assumptions in order to come to terms with the disturbing politics that has brought about this triumph of the radical left and defeat of the professional right since roughly the start of the COVID-19 outbreak and the 2020 defeat of President Donald Trump.

Readers interested in religion and ideology will find more extended sections on charity/welfare, education, and gender/sexual ideology similarly suggestive within the larger argument that by transforming civic life into contests between professional "politicos" we may have predestined the triumph of the secular left and the eclipse of everyone else.

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