Book Reviews

The new governance of religious diversity

Tariq Modood and Thomas Sealy

Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2024, 205 pp., ISBN 978-0745653785, $32.95 US (paperback)

Everyone is trying to solve the global problem of religious persecution these days. This book is a very credible attempt to develop a framework for governance that respects religious diversity and can be contextualized for different countries and cultural contexts.

The authors are sociologists at the University of Bristol in Britain. Tariq Modood has focused his prodigious writing on secularism, religion and racism. Thomas Sealy was Modood's student and also focuses on ethnicity, religion and secularism. This book comes out of a multi-year European Union (EU)-funded global research project with the acronym GREASE, focusing on radicalisation, secularism and the governance of religion. There is therefore a solid research foundation for this book.

The book focuses on four countries in Europe and three in South and Southeast Asia. The European countries are Belgium, France, Germany and the United Kingdom (UK). The Asian countries are India, Indonesia and Malaysia. All the countries are democracies but have very different religious histories and relationships between church and state.

In Part II, Modood and Sealy first articulate various models of secularism: majoritarian nationalism; secularist statism; liberal neutralism; moderate secularism; and pluralistic ("unity in diversity") nationalism (see the helpful table on page 39). This typology was developed after assessing 26 countries. The authors qualify the typology by noting that no country fits perfectly in any of the models.

Modood and Sealy identify two types of norms that are operative: DONs and QONs. DON stands for "dominant operative norms", which are constitutional and legal norms that are used in practice. QONs are "qualifying operative norms" that qualify the way DONs operate.

After explicating the models and norms, the authors have a chapter each applying them to the countries in Europe and in Asia. This is where the differences between seemingly similar countries become apparent. To illustrate the application of DONs and QONs, Modood and Sealy extend their analysis to six additional European countries. In Albania and Bulgaria, moderate secularism forms the DONs and secularist statism the QONs. Italy, Spain, Hungary and Slovakia similarly have moderate secularism forming the DONs but majoritarian nationalism the QONs.

In the three Asian countries, the authors identify DONs of pluralistic nationalism, although these are expressed in different ways in the three countries. All three also have QONs of majoritarian nationalism, which threatens pluralism. Modood and Sealy further analyse Bangladesh and Pakistan, which have majoritarian nationalism forming the DONs. They also briefly look at four countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) – Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey – that also have majoritarian nationalism as the DONs. In these four states, religious minorities do not enjoy equal status and may not be tolerated at all.

Chapter 5 is the fulcrum of the book and sets out the authors' "normative mode of the governance of religious diversity" that they believe can be adapted for the countries they have analysed. They call their normative mode "multicultural secularism." In this chapter, Modood and Sealy engage with theorists in the liberal West as well as in India to identify points of agreement and disagreement with their model.

Multicultural secularism re-orients the ideal of equality to include respect for difference. This requires the state to include both symbolic acknowledgment of minorities and institutional accommodation and participation. Rather than majoritarian nationalism, the state should strive to enable citizens to identify with the state without having to erase other identities.

A particularly compelling aspect of the normative mode proposed is that the authors advocate "equalizing upwards." This concept was first proposed by Charles Taylor, the eminent Canadian philosopher. It requires the state to extend benefits enjoyed by the majority religion to minority religions rather than subtracting benefits from the majority.

The ensuing two chapters seek to apply multicultural secularism to the same European countries and Asian countries as above. The authors recognise that the term "secularism" may be anathema in Asia but the model itself can still be applied. The application concludes with another helpful table on page 159 that identifies how this can all work in practice in the variety of current regulatory norms found in the focus countries.

The original purpose behind the GREASE project was for European countries to draw lessons from non-Western countries on the governance of religious diversity. This book goes beyond that to also identify changes to regulatory structures in several Asian countries that can also be adapted to include religious diversity. Whether any national or local government has the will to adopt some of these norms remains to be seen.

As Modood and Sealy acknowledge, multicultural secularism is "thicker" than Western European secularism in including religious diversity, but it is "thinner" than Asian pluralistic nationalism. As the world is becoming more globalised and

more diverse, states should be encouraged to find common ground to "de-other" religious minorities and find ways to include them in the public square.

I highly recommend this book for those who are struggling to find more inclusive models of governance than they see in their own country. Of course, it is also valuable for academics in sociology, political studies and international relations to better understand current modes of governance of religious diversity and why they are not working. I found the proposed model compelling, particularly as it can be contextualized for many cultures.

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Why religious freedom matters: Human rights and human flourishing

Allen D. Hertzke

Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 2026, 264 pp., ISBN: 978-0268211066, $45.00

Allen Hertzke offers a comprehensive and empirically grounded argument for the centrality of religious freedom in shaping democratic, peaceful, and prosperous societies. Drawing on a quarter-century of engagement with global scholarship and advocacy networks, he synthesizes historical, ethnographic, and quantitative evidence to demonstrate that the protection of religious liberty is not merely a normative ideal but a practical necessity for human flourishing. Hertzke situates the work within ongoing debates about the global rise in religious repression, presenting a timely and ambitious attempt to marshal interdisciplinary evidence in defence of religious freedom.

Among this book's many insights, one statement stands out as particularly profound: "If there is a common bond that can unite diverse religious traditions, it is *reverence*" (Hertzke 2026:167). In an era characterized by polarization, identity politics, and deep ideological divisions, Hertzke reminds readers of a simple but often forgotten truth. Reverence does not require agreement, conversion, or uniformity; rather, it entails recognizing that awe and wonder are universal human experiences. These emotions transcend religious affiliation, cultural background, and political ideology, arising from a shared human capacity to encounter something greater than oneself. In this sense, reverence exists independently of specific processes of indoctrination, socialization, or even formal religious belief. It offers a common ground for mutual respect and peaceful coexistence.

This book links religious liberty with a wide range of positive societal outcomes. Hertzke argues that societies that protect freedom of religion or belief

tend to demonstrate stronger democratic institutions, greater economic vitality, and enhanced social peace. He develops this argument through a comparative lens, drawing on global datasets and illustrative case studies. In doing so, Hertzke moves beyond abstract advocacy to present a broadly empirical case that is of interest to scholars in political science, international relations, and religious studies alike. His central claim is that religious freedom fosters the conditions under which individuals and communities can be who they are, thereby supporting both personal dignity and collective stability.

Hertzke engages with a wide body of literature, integrating insights from history, sociology, economics, and international relations. This breadth allows him to construct a multifaceted argument that situates religious freedom within larger patterns of governance and development. Particularly noteworthy is his emphasis on the interaction between religious liberty and other rights, including gender equality and socio-economic inclusion, and on how religious freedom enables women to overcome cultural and legal barriers that limit their autonomy and agency. In this respect, the book contributes to a growing body of scholarship that seeks to understand religious freedom not in isolation but as part of a broader human rights ecosystem.

The volume is also attentive to the global context in which debates over religious freedom unfold. Hertzke documents the persistence, and in some regions the intensification, of religious persecution and discrimination in the 21st century. By collecting evidence from diverse geographic contexts, he underscores the uneven and contested nature of religious liberty worldwide. Hertzke's analysis reinforces the importance of sustained scholarly and policy engagement with these challenges.

Perhaps a more explicit engagement with critiques of the religious freedom paradigm, particularly those emerging from postcolonial or critical human rights perspectives, would have strengthened the analytical balance of the work. Regardless of this limitation, however, Hertzke has produced a significant and timely contribution to the study of religious freedom. By combining empirical analysis with normative reflection, he demonstrates that religious liberty is integral to both individual dignity and societal flourishing. For readers seeking a comprehensive overview of the role of religious freedom in shaping global outcomes, this volume provides a valuable and persuasive resource. It will be of particular interest to those engaged in interdisciplinary research and policy work on religion and public life, and it underscores the ongoing need for scholarship that illuminates the complex dynamics of belief, freedom, and human well-being in a rapidly changing world.

Reverence may, indeed, be the missing ingredient in many contemporary debates about rights, religion, and democracy, as policymakers and scholars fre-

quently focus on legal protections, institutional arrangements, and political reforms. Hertzke concludes with a deceptively simple yet profoundly important insight. He poses the question of how we can live with our differences in a shrinking world, and he proposes the answer of investing in "enlightened strategies that protect freedom of conscience and religious practice" (170). The implications and positive impact of this argument are potentially far-reaching.

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Secularization, social order, and world history: Toward a global perspective

Kevin N. Flatt

Milton Park: Routledge, 2025, 278 pp., ISBN 978-1041075325, €168.00 (hardcover)

In 240 pages of text, Kevin Flatt argues that secularization is not merely the decline of religion, where God and faith are gradually replaced by humans and reason. Rather, secularization is a revolution in all aspects and 'affects not only religion but all social domains.' Given that understanding, the book asks, how can we apply this idea in a global perspective?

Most Western scholars look at secularization through European and American historical glasses. They view history as a battle between religion and secularism or non-religion, in which religion is defended by one institution: the Church. This perspective is problematic, as belief systems of other cultures and historical ages can't necessarily be defined as religions and don't or didn't have a church-like institution to defend it. The word 'religion' itself did not even exist in many if not most languages up to the 19th century. After all, Jesuit missionaries to China struggled with the question of whether to define Buddhism and Confucianism as religions or non-religions. That's why talking about secularization as a decline of religion in a global perspective is problematic.

To bridge these epistemic gaps, Flatt introduces the concept of a sacred-social order. The sacred includes a divine aspect, which can be a concrete god as in Islam or a more abstract force like the Chinese idea of the Mandate of Heaven, by which emperors ruled the country for almost 3,000 years and which is obviously the opposite of a secular order. The social order, on the other hand, 'puts the stress on our shared or collective life,' including relationships, institutions, the ordering of time and space, family, sex, marriage, law and government. Combining the two, the sacred-social order thus becomes the overarching way in which societies are ordered and how they see the world. One could compare it with Michel Foucault's concept of episteme.

The shift from one episteme or sacred-social order to another constitutes what we can call a proper revolution. Flatt describes the well-known revolution from the Roman sacred-social order to a Christian one from the 3rd to the 5th century CE. Revolutions of this scale take place over an extended period of time, characterized by periodic relapses and attempts to reverse the tide. One famous example is the Roman emperor Julian, called the Apostate by Christians, who ruled from 361 to 363 and tried in vain to revive the pagan sacred-social order. Revolutions like the Christian one are (almost) unstoppable, just as is the secular revolution that has been overthrowing the Christian sacred-social order since the 18th century. In Europe, the church seemed successful in stopping this secularizing trend between 1815 and 1860 and again between 1930 and 1950, but it has had to admit its defeat in the subsequent decades.

The new secular order has been spreading from Europe to the rest of the world. The revolutionary proportions of this trend were most notable in the communist revolutions in Russia and China, but also in Turkey where Mustafa Kemal Ataturk imposed secularism in almost every aspect of life. Not surprisingly, new movements have sought to reverse this trend, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East, evangelicals in the United States, the AKP party in Turkey or the BJP party in India. However, just as the emperor Julian failed to stop the Christian revolution in the 4th century, these movements will fail to stop the rise of the secular order, Flatt argues. As we are in the middle of a paradigm shift, like that of the 4th century, different sacred-social orders will exist alongside each other for a time.

The strength of this interesting book is also its weakness: it aims to take a global perspective while simultaneously claiming that secularization is a Western concept that is spreading over the world. Secularization in the West has entailed a centuries-long battle against the overarching power of the church, in which the secular order has been taking ground step by step. One could argue that the secular revolution was nowhere as necessary as in Christian Europe, because in other sacred-social orders there was more room for other ways of thinking. Perhaps there never was a revolution against Confucianism before Mao because it wasn't seen as needed. Despite the concept of the Mandate of Heaven, one could argue that Confucianist China has always known some kind of secular order. It is not a coincidence that the Jesuit reports coming from China inspired the fathers of the Enlightenment and their ideas of secularism. Reflections such as this one on cross-cultural contrasts might have made this fascinating book even richer and more global.

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Faith in United Nations human rights treaties: Legal and religious commentaries for research and peer-learning

Michael Wiener, Ibrahim Salama and Britta Nicolmann (eds.)

San José, Cairo and Oslo: University for Peace, The British University in Egypt and Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, 2026, 650 pp., ISBN 978-9930542767, available online

The title *Faith in United Nations Human Rights Treaties* functions as a deliberate double entendre. On one level, the volume comprises a collection of essays examining faith-based perspectives on a wide range of United Nations (UN) human rights instruments. On another, it echoes the preamble to the United Nations Charter, which reaffirms "faith in fundamental human rights." The book not only traces the contributions of religious actors to the drafting of these instruments but also explores how diverse religious traditions have promoted, interpreted, and appropriated human rights within their own theological and cultural frameworks.

Bringing together an impressive array of leading scholars in religion and international law, the volume reflects a broad spectrum of faith traditions and disciplinary perspectives. As such, it constitutes a valuable resource for both religious studies and legal scholarship, offering interdisciplinary insights of considerable depth and breadth.

For scholars of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), the most significant instruments examined are the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR). The chapter on the Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred constituting incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence is also particularly relevant, given the vulnerability of many religious minorities to hatred and violence, increasingly amplified through social media. Other instruments discussed in the volume are more tangentially related to FoRB, although they remain important to many faith communities. One notable omission is the *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief*, a foundational document in the development of international religious freedom norms.

The opening chapter appropriately focuses on the development of the UDHR. Katharina Kunter and Rabbi Alex Goldberg offer a persuasive challenge to the common assertion that the UDHR is primarily a Western or Christian articulation of human rights. Instead, they demonstrate its pluralistic intellectual foundations, identifying contributions from Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Confucian traditions. The chapter also highlights the political and cultural complexities surrounding the Declaration's adoption, illuminating the careful negotiations and compromises required to produce language acceptable across diverse religious and cultural contexts.

The chapter on the ICCPR is equally instructive. Drawing upon the *travaux préparatoires*, it examines in detail the debates surrounding the wording of Article 18, the Covenant's central provision on freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. The chapter also reviews significant jurisprudence of the Human Rights Committee, which hears individual communications against states party to the Optional Protocol. Gentian Zyberi and Ahmed Shaheed, together with Zeynep Baysar, bring substantial expertise to this analysis, resulting in a particularly authoritative treatment of the subject.

The chapters on the Rabat Plan of Action and the Beirut Declaration are similarly valuable. The Rabat Plan's emphasis on combating hate speech remains highly influential within UN circles, although its principles have too often failed to shape national legislation and policy to the degree intended. Likewise, the Beirut Declaration and the associated *Faith for Rights* commitments deserve wider recognition. Together, they provide an important framework for interfaith cooperation in the promotion of human rights, including FoRB.

The volume's chapters on the conventions addressing racism, torture, the rights of the child, the rights of persons with disabilities, and enforced disappearances are all informative and engaging. Each examines the participation of religious actors in the drafting process as well as relevant treaty-body decisions concerning religion. Although the inclusion of a chapter on the *Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture*, without a corresponding chapter on the Convention itself, initially appears somewhat unusual, the discussion is nevertheless useful for readers interested in mechanisms aimed at preventing torture and other forms of ill-treatment.

The chapter on the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) is among the longest in the volume and at times includes more detail than necessary, particularly regarding individual state reservations. Nevertheless, it addresses an important and often contentious issue: the relationship between religious traditions and women's rights. While certain religiously grounded norms have been used to restrict women's roles and opportunities, faith-based actors have also been important advocates for gender equality. The chapter effectively illustrates how religion can function both as an obstacle to, and a resource for, advancing women's rights.

As is often the case in edited collections, some chapters appear less well integrated into the volume's central theme. One such example examines the absence of Dharmic perspectives in the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR). While the discussion is intellectually interesting and raises important questions about alternative normative traditions, focusing on influences that were absent from the drafting process seems somewhat tangen-

tial to the book's primary purpose. Similarly, the chapter on the draft *International Covenant on the Right to Development* feels premature. Given that the authors participated directly in drafting the text, their enthusiasm for the project is understandable. Although the chapter demonstrates how concepts of development resonate with a variety of religious traditions, its focus on a still-developing instrument somewhat weakens its fit within a volume otherwise centred on established human rights treaties. The chapter on the *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families* likewise offers relatively limited engagement with religious themes and could arguably have been omitted.

The two chapters devoted to the Geneva Conventions are also somewhat idiosyncratic in their focus. One examines the meaning of the phrase "dictates of public conscience" within international humanitarian law, while the other explores the relationship between Islamic law and the Additional Protocols to the 1949 Geneva Conventions. The latter provides a useful demonstration of the compatibility between key humanitarian protections and Islamic law. At the same time, the persistence of civilian targeting in armed conflicts involving actors from Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, and other religious backgrounds serves as a sobering reminder that religious traditions often exert limited restraining influence during war. The gap between religious ethical teachings and actual conduct in armed conflict remains a persistent challenge across traditions.

Faith in United Nations Human Rights Treaties is not a book that most readers will approach sequentially from cover to cover. Rather, it is best understood as a reference work. Its greatest strength lies in providing a comprehensive guide to the interactions between faith communities and specific UN human rights instruments. For researchers working on religion and international human rights law, the volume offers a rich repository of information and analysis. Its online availability further enhances its value, making the text both accessible and searchable for scholars and practitioners alike.

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Christ and covenant in global politics: A Christian introduction to International Relations

Robert J. Joustra

Lisle: IVP Academic, 2026, 256 pp., ISBN: 978-1514007860, $29.99 US

This book is a formidable summary of Robert Joustra's considered reflections on International Relations (IR) in academia and in practice. He notes that it

is the product of about a decade of thinking about these topics and teaching them to undergraduates. It is a thoroughgoing and engrossing book, broad in scope and in reference. As a text that serves both as a Christian critique of received IR theory and an articulation of Joustra's own broad musings on multiple topics, it is difficult to review. So much is packed in here that a short review may not do it justice.

In sum, *Christ and Covenant* is Joustra's attempt to bring a Reformed Christian commentary to instruction in the key topics of IR. That is a very important task to do for those of us who teach at Christian institutions where students must struggle systematically to apply a Christian worldview to their studies. It is a yeoman's task that Joustra takes on with gusto. This book ideally serves in tandem with a course on IR such as one that Joustra himself would teach.

Joustra begins by framing his book on the ideal of justice. Using justice as a frame of reasoning in IR is a bit of a tall order, at least in part because it is derivative of something earthier – power. As all students of IR are taught, Thucydides wrote that "the standard of justice depends upon the equality of power to compel." But Joustra argues that power's chief intent from God's standpoint is the achievement of justice – something that must be defined separately from the use of power. Joustra links it to what he calls a "Hebraic" notion of justice, rooted in the law as handed down by God as "something of a love letter to his lost creation". Joustra rightly points out that the Hebrew notion of law shares little with our contemporary use of the term, connoting a sort of philosophy or way of life – sometimes it might be better translated "instruction" – in this case, of a divine nature.

He moves on to comment on the normative claims that underpin the common theories of IR: realism, liberal internationalism (he uses the term "rationalism"), and Marxism. Here is where a student in an introductory course in IR theory will get the greatest use. As a heuristic device, Joustra draws on David Koyzis's book on ideologies, *Political Visions and Illusions*, interrogating each theory on the basis of five distinct questions about worldview.

Here is where I think there is a danger in Joustra's approach. A common affliction among undergraduates is the conflation of IR theories with ideologies. Theories are *not* ideologies, and though they may be prescriptive, a realist does not need to be a conservative, nor a liberal internationalist a member of the Democratic Party in the US. While IR theory is *based* on worldviews, I think it does a disservice to students to perpetuate the myth of ideological taint in IR theory. The distinction here remains a little bit blurry. For example, liberal internationalism does not need to be based on norms, prescriptions, or dreams about the international order. Its proponents do not need to presume a normative commitment

to global governance institutions. Liberal internationalism merely observes, for example, that the importance of non-state actors may come to overwhelm the potency of the state in certain circumstances. While many liberals might think that to be a normatively good thing, they may just as easily identify the problems that arise with it.

Joustra goes on to comment on some of the chief concerns of IR theory – the prominence of the state, the lessons of anarchy in IR, and the significance of national communities – each of which is questioned by the Christian for very good reasons. The last few chapters move on to the application of the problem of Christian justice to IR. First is the dominant strategy of self-help amid the tragedy of the commons, which Joustra applies to the global environmental crisis. Second is the drive of capitalism to succeed without consideration of the underlying virtue of the common good. Third is the use of violence to achieve our ends, which leads Joustra to contemplate the justice of military intervention.

Joustra's book is the product of an intelligent and well-read individual. The book presumes a very well-informed reader with a mind awake to the many contributions of modern political thought. It also presumes a strong foundation in IR theory. Joustra clearly expects that readers will know some of the basics of IR theory going in – but he also expects them to be familiar with a wide variety of sources. The Melian Dialogue (quoted above) is referenced without being placed in context. He makes airy reference to Davos, which might not immediately alert the reader to its relationship with the World Economic Forum. He brandishes the term "Fordism", which was not commonly used at an introductory level when I was an undergraduate, without providing an explanation. As someone used to all of these references, I had no trouble following, but I fear that a second-year undergraduate might struggle. The book therefore stands as a provocative way to explore IR theory at the advanced undergraduate or (more likely) graduate level, in my view.

Joustra writes this book in a very approachable way, as long as one has some background in the vast number of references that he makes to philosophers, theorists, and the media. It reads in as entertaining and convivial a way as would a conversation with its author, whose voice is clear throughout. It reveals the density of the author's knowledge of Reformed theology and related political themes, of much of IR theory, of philosophy and of pop culture. As to the latter, the references occasionally come fast and furious, from zombies to *Settlers of Catan*. *The Mandalorian* and *MacGyver* are each referenced within a couple of pages of one another. Viewers of the one may be hard put to be aware of the other, given the years between them. So the book has a bit of a parochial feel, winking at an audience that will really understand the author – maybe some of the students in

his own classes – but which might be a little confusing to those outside. There is a feeling of, "If you know, you know."

As a fellow professor of IR, I salute the pedagogical organization of the book, starting with an assessment of the prominent theories of IR. However, there are a few odd gaps: no mention of Kenneth Waltz or Hedley Bull in the chapter on realism; no references to Antonio Gramsci or Robert Cox as nods to neo-Marxism. The chapter on Marxism meanders toward a discussion of constructivism: it struck me as odd that the same chapter deals with the work of Karl Marx and Alexander Wendt.

Joustra's conclusion suggests that the global need to understand and accommodate multiple worldviews commends our respect for differences among nations. In response to the demand for a normative answer to this diversity, he cites the concept of covenantal pluralism, explored elsewhere in his own work and that of Chris Seiple and Dennis Hoover. While it may be more difficult to apply a covenantal relationship to the international system than to a nation-state, it is a laudable way to frame Christian responses to the intricate differences we deal with at the global level.

Readers outside the realist or Reformed schools might be taken aback by the occasional assertions about authority or (more notably) the use of violence. Joustra deals judiciously with critiques of the state but remains of the opinion that it is the single most important actor in world politics, one which the Christian must respect at some level. He also makes a strong case for the application of Just War theory to questions surrounding military intervention, arguing that war is "not a necessary evil but the work of love and justice" (197). This point should not be read out of context, but one must always guard against the possible spiritualization of what are ultimately mundane earthly conflicts.

What lessons are there here for religious freedom? Human rights are not a focal point of Joustra's book, though they do get a few mentions. But his placement of justice at the heart of IR makes the case for humanitarian concern to be a central point of reference for IR. Justice, law, and principle are therefore appropriate concerns for the state in international affairs. What is more, his embrace of covenantal pluralism, with its recognition that spirituality and the search for meaning are universal (139), commits the Christian to the promotion of freedom of religion and belief as an extension of our respect for the differences among human beings. These commitments to biblical justice are central to his account of the Christian worldview, underpinning any faithful analytical theory of international politics and action in favour of the common good.

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Religious freedom in Colombia and Mexico: An approach to broadening categories and public policy actions from a comparative public policy approach

Camila Andrea Sánchez Sandoval

Bonn: VKW, 2025, 170 pp., ISBN: 978-3862693016, free download at https://iirf.global/

Taking religious freedom out of abstraction

The contribution of this work lies in its point of departure: giving content to religious freedom from the standpoint of public policy, beyond mere declaration, through a comparison of Mexico and Colombia. This review argues that the move is sound but incomplete because of the author's own decision: by excluding laicity from her framework, the book cannot distinguish religious freedom as a right of persons from religious freedom as a prerogative of organizations, and that conflation runs through its findings.

Much of the regional literature states that religious freedom is a recognized human right and takes for granted that the statement produces effects. Sánchez Sandoval reverses the order, asking *which categories of expansion of religious freedom in Mexico and Colombia have an impact on the generation of public policy actions*, and shifts the problem from the declarative plane to that of state decisions. The right becomes a policy objective dependent on identifiable triggers: constitutional change, the ruler's religious affiliation, religious sectors' demands, violations, religious tradition, and international influence.

The problematization starts from a diagnosis drawn from Fox (2015:1), for whom there is "no agreement whatsoever on how we should define, understand, or even name" religious freedom. On that basis, Sánchez Sandoval treats it as a concept that has not yet been conceptualized: no declaration defines what it covers or who holds it, and that indeterminacy passes to states, whose documents mention the right without specifying components or limits; where the concept is undefined, violation finds room. She further finds that the documents analyzed do not identify the public problem they claim to address, reducing much of both countries' religious policy to "actions without a specific purpose" – perhaps her most transferable finding.

Two instruments and their limits: The curtain and expansion

To organize the literature, the author proposes a two-sided curtain: a conventional perspective that defines and promotes the right, and a skeptical one that questions its Western matrix, its bias toward recognized religions, and its conflict with other rights. Presenting the two as complementary is apt, but a curtain opens

symmetrically and the field does not. In Latin America the discussion has tilted toward the skeptical line under empirical pressure: de-institutionalized religion, unregistered cults, spiritualities without church form, and non-Christian communities render inoperative a notion of religious freedom designed for confessions with doctrine, clergy, and territory (Gaytán Alcalá 2018). The author notices this – Colombia's Law 133 of 1994 excludes santería and occultism – but the metaphor keeps her from the consequence: here the skeptical side does not complement the conventional one; it overflows it.

The operative concept is *expansion*, grounded in the progressivity of human rights and defined as any normative increase produced by state actors. Yet progressivity has a reverse side the book does not explore: the prohibition of regression. Measured by normative accumulation alone, expansion misses de facto setbacks – conscientious objection that obstructs recognized rights, electoral participation by ministers of worship that the law forbids – which in both countries occur while legislation grows. The author senses it – legal development "does not automatically translate into a full expansion and guarantee" – but her instrument measures only half the equation.

Comparison, method, and history

The methodology is qualitative – coding of 34 documents in a comparative case design – adopted after statistical models failed for lack of variance, itself a finding: no comparable data exist. Case selection is the most productive decision: Mexico and Colombia share a Catholic matrix and extensive legislation, but their regimes differ: a radical laicity of anticlerical origin that bars the clergy from politics, versus a pluri-confessional laicity in which the state never adhered to separation and churches participate continuously in politics. The comparison holds belief constant and varies the regime: not how much religion there is, but how the state processes it.

The historical trajectories confirm the difference. Mexico moves from anticlericalism and the 1917 Constitution to the 1992 Law on Religious Associations and later jurisprudential expansion; Colombia, from the 1991 Constituent Assembly, where evangelical minorities enter as political actors, to Law 133 of 1994 and the 2018 Comprehensive Public Policy, the right becoming electoral currency between rulers and megachurches. Both share three policy changes – the 19th century, the 1990s laws, the 2010s turn toward concrete action – and one underlying difference: Mexico guarantees the right to every belief; Colombia, only to what its law recognizes as religion.

Transfer and counter-transfer

The most original proposal is *counter-transfer*, drawn from Porto de Oliveira and Pal (2018), to name resistance to policy transfer: between 1990 and 2012 both coun-

tries combined abundant legislation with "a certain legal complacency and lack of political will." The intuition is valuable, but the concept has an identification problem: in its source literature it presupposes a model that circulates and actors who block it, and the author acknowledges identifying no leading country. Without a model to resist, she describes inertia. Making the notion a tool requires naming what was transferred and who stopped it: the 1997 Colombian "evangelical concordat," which the book documents, is a better candidate than generic political will.

The absence: Laicity and the two religious freedoms

Here lies the central point. The book announces at the outset that it will not discuss laicity or secularization, deeming them conceptually independent. The delimitation is legitimate but costly: in Latin America religious freedom cannot be understood outside laicity, which, as an instrument for legitimizing the state against a politically ambitious religious authority, defined what could be claimed as religious freedom and by whom (Gaytán Alcalá, 2018). The findings show it: the Mexico-Colombia difference is one between regimes of laicity, and the coding yields a code labeled "Church-State separation" that conditions all subsequent Mexican legislation. Laicity is not absent from the evidence; it is absent from the framework.

That absence conceals the distinction the material demands: religious freedom operates in two registers the book treats as one. In the first it is an individual right – to believe, not to believe, to change and manifest one's conviction; in the second, a prerogative of organizations, claimed not as a guarantee for their faithful but as an entitlement to speak in their name and exercise guardianship over their voice in public (Vaggione 2017). Much of what the book records as expansion – registration of associations, ministers' rights, agreements, consultation tables – belongs to the second register, and the Colombian politicization it criticizes is its consequence. Distinguishing the two would have allowed the question that laicity raises and the book does not reach: whether organizational expansion widens or narrows individual freedom.

Strengths, weaknesses, and avenues

Strengths: a question that moves the right toward public policy; the public-problem deficit identified; a sound comparison; methodological candor. Weaknesses: the exclusion of laicity and the conflation of individual and organizational freedom; a measure of expansion blind to regression; a counter-transfer without a model; incomplete references and a corpus of 34 documents in the abstract but 36 in the introduction.

Of the five research avenues proposed, two are viable and engage this critique: the right's entry into the legislative agenda, its actors and lobbying – connected

with the documented politicization and the individual/organizational distinction – and the subnational level, where in Mexico the municipality is the terrain on which the right is in fact expanded or violated. Advocacy coalition frameworks applied to the same corpus would correct the weakness of counter-transfer, since they require naming actors. The quantitative and impact-evaluation avenues run up against what the book itself documents: neither the database nor the budgetary information they need exists.

Assessment

The work delivers what it promises: it opens a field – religious freedom as an object of comparative public policy – with a precise question and a well-chosen comparison. Its limit lies in what it decides not to do: by dispensing with laicity it leaves out the concept that would explain why one and the same majority belief produces two such different regimes, and why the expansion it documents so often benefits organizations before persons. The research that follows should begin there.

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Religious persecution: Perspectives from theology and missiology

Christof Sauer and Robert Lilleaasen (eds.)

Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2025, 460 pp., ISBN 978-3862693252, €30.00, free download from https://iirf.global/

This comprehensive anthology, comprising 17 contributions from nine countries, is the result of the research project 'Religious Freedom and Religious Persecution' at Fjellhaug International University College, carried out between 2019 and 2025. Lilleaasen, an associate professor at the college, coordinated this project together with Christof Sauer, IIRF founder and a part-time professor of religious studies and missiology there who served as a consultant on the project.

The project aimed to explore the theological and missiological dimensions of persecution, based on the conviction that the phenomenon of persecution must be understood not only as a socio-political phenomenon but also as a spiritual and ecclesial one (21). This anthology thus provides an important contribution to the discourse on religious freedom, which understandably, given its high practical relevance, tends to focus primarily on practical policies in advocacy work. This project takes a step back and sheds light on underlying premises, established traditions and valuable resources drawn from the Christian tradition. In doing so, it provides a critical counterbalance to the all-too-rapid co-optation of religious issues by the civil sphere or the functional exploitation of religious persecution in advocacy work.

The anthology organises the contributions according to the classical disciplines of theology (five contributions in biblical studies, five in church history and systematic theology, four in practical theology, four in missiology and religious studies, and finally two in applied theology in the form of personal reflections and practical application). This arrangement establishes from the outset the ambition to understand the topic of religious persecution as a theme spanning the entire theological encyclopaedia. Given the scope and breadth of the contributions, this review focuses on two of them: the opening foundational essay by Sauer and Werner Nel on 'Definitions, scales, and spectra reflected in the context of theology and missiology' and Sara Afshari's systematic-theological exploration of Holy Saturday as a lens for a theology of persecution.

Sauer and Nel provide a comprehensive interdisciplinary discussion of definitions of persecution from the fields of psychology, sociology and law before proposing a theological definition. They then analyse selected definitions from Christian sources (Open Doors World Watch List, Voice of the Martyrs Canada and Aid to the Church in Need), ultimately grouping the various definitions according to their strengths and limitations. This analysis leads to the development of a model that aims to encompass the broad spectrum of definitions as comprehensively as possible. The task arises from the fact that the term 'persecution' is used in both a broad and a narrow sense, with different interests and perspectives playing a role, leading to dissatisfaction and calls for more nuanced terminology (34).

The strength of Sauer and Nel's article lies in its opening up of this interdisciplinary discourse to theology. Its relevance is heightened, above all, by the grow-

ing religious illiteracy amongst key stakeholders and political decision-makers in the West. This becomes clear at the start of the third section, where the authors refer to the Lutheran theologian Michael Knippa, who holds the view "that it is not the task of the Christian church to *define* persecution, but to *discern* it" (47). Here, the question of the definition of persecution is regarded not as a static determination but as a spiritual practice which must prove itself anew in ever-changing contexts and must be viewed "as a virtue to be maintained rather than a deficiency to be corrected" (48).

On one hand, such a theological approach resists any reductionist, static definition or determination of what persecution must be; on the other hand, it opens itself up to the transcendent dimension of this phenomenon, which – despite the currently dominant post-metaphysical, modern conditions of knowledge – highlights a fact that has been unjustly underemphasised. Were this line of argument pursued consistently, the essay could end here, but the authors also wish to develop overarching defining characteristics of religious persecution drawn from the New Testament. A critical reading would see this attempt to align with other academic disciplines as the subordination of theology to extra-theological epistemologies (in this case, those of the empirical social sciences), which, due to this framework, run the risk of reductionism. It is therefore only logical to conclude that "it seems unattainable to achieve a universal interdisciplinary understanding" (69). A more favourable interpretation recognizes the tension in the authors' endeavour to translate theological perspectives into a discursive context that operates unquestioningly with functional logics (e.g. in advocacy work).

Sauer and Nel conclude by suggesting that it is better to speak of 'spectra' rather than 'scales', spectra being "a multi-dimensional model, e.g. a pyramid with multiple facets […], that exceeds the approach of scales" (63), as these potentially mutually exclusive definitions can be viewed as coexisting and complementary. They provide a nuanced, encyclopaedic overview of the issue of defining persecution. In doing so, they assist researchers and practitioners in avoiding the tendency to promote their own particular perspective in an overly dominant and unquestioning manner. Instead, Sauer and Nel encourage the judicious application of various perspectives, whilst being mindful of their contingencies and limitations. Their research thus serves the interests of Christians facing discrimination and persecution, as well as the cause of religious freedom for all, thereby realigning the focus from a mere end in itself to serving the community of reference within theology.

Sara Afshari is herself a victim of religious persecution, having been forced to flee Iran and now living in exile in the UK. As an Anglican Christian, she bases her theology of persecution on a conceptual framework that is more

commonly found in the Roman Catholic tradition, one borrowed from the Roman Catholic theologian and priest Hans Urs von Balthasar. Afshari explores Holy Saturday as an appropriate lens through which to gain a more nuanced understanding of persecution from the perspective of the affected part of the Church. She declares boldly, "If our theology cannot hold space for the long, uncertain Saturday, then it cannot speak truthfully to the reality of persecution" (254).

Afshari laments that Holy Saturday is often unjustly neglected in theological discussions of persecution (243). However, Holy Saturday provides the church with theological vocabulary for its suffering. For it acknowledges the church's experience that it does not yet live in victory (*ecclesia triumphans)*, but that it also, as *ecclesia patiens*, remains on this earth amidst fear and uncertainty. She seeks to develop a 'framework of descent': "Here, descent does not mean theological collapse, but sacred solidarity with Christ, who also descended" (238). Afshari does this by interweaving three narratives from the Passion story. First, the disciples in hiding embody the existential question of the persecuted Church: 'Who are we now?' (238). Second, Christ descends into the realm of the dead and bears the full burden of sin, abandonment and silence, becoming the theological and spiritual centre of endurance in persecution (238). Third, drawing on Balthasar, she takes up the Trinitarian triad of communal perseverance, holy waiting and divine descent, which calls the global church to solidarity (238).

Afshari elaborates on these theological themes by using the example of her own experience in her home parish in Iran, the Episcopal Church of Kerman, St Andrew's, founded in the early 20th century by the Church Mission Society (CMS). In this way, she brings to light a blind spot in the academic debate on a theology of persecution. Her perspective as someone directly affected provides an important corrective to an academic discourse that is, for the most part, led by people in privileged circumstances (myself included). This tendency is again evident if Afshari's second contribution, in the applied section of the anthology, where she takes a critical look at the fourth Lausanne Congress held in South Korea in 2024. In that article, she notes that persecution is reduced to emotional appeals for evangelism or support, which undermines the deeper spiritual dimension of this suffering experienced within the church. Moreover, by reducing persecution to a problem that needs to be solved, the church misses the opportunity to regard this suffering as a sacred witness, in which Christians learn to bear their cross together (440-441).

However, in her efforts to further develop Balthasar's concept of the triune God's solidarity with humanity, Afshari confronts a theological dilemma. In his

work, Balthasar connects solidarity exclusively to God's relation to humankind, because God, in his sovereignty, has the freedom to choose whether to enter into a relationship with humankind. Afshari concludes from this observation that the global church too should now stand in solidarity with the persecuted part of the body (238, 255). Here, then, this bond of solidarity stems from a decision. In common parlance, however, solidarity is a deliberate act between separate parties: 'I declare my solidarity with X.' The logic behind this commitment is that we were initially separate and that I am now choosing to stand by you. But in this way, the ontological foundation is lost. According to 1 Corinthians 12:27, the Church is already the body of Christ, and our action follows from this identity. We support fellow Christians because they are e.g. our foot; if you sever them, you sever yourself. But for Afshari, 'We are already one in Christ' seems to be replaced by 'We should stand together.' This shift weakens the urgency of the author's argument. If it is merely a decision, it can also be reversed.

Moreover, the valuable contribution of Afshari's essay lies in its proposition that the unpersecuted part of the body can learn from the persecuted part. However, the concept of solidarity is usually used one-sidedly: 'The West stands in solidarity with the persecuted church.' Rarely do we hear the reverse: 'The persecuted church stands in solidarity with us.' It sounds like help flowing from the strong to the weak, which is precisely not Afshari's concern, and which loses the benefit of reciprocity and the reversal of perspective. In the New Testament, the persecuted church is often the spiritually strong part that corrects the whole body (Rev 2-3). The image of the body prevents anyone from becoming a mere recipient. Ultimately, this terminology makes Afshari's message more accessible as outsiders immediately understand what is meant. 'Koinonia' needs to be explained, whereas 'solidarity' is a powerful term in public and interdisciplinary discourse and creates a sense of urgency for action. Presumably, the church fathers would have classified the meaning of the term under 'philanthropia' or 'koinonia.' The danger here, however, is that the term 'solidarity' could replace the biblical foundation rather than translating it.

The three essays discussed here demonstrate the wealth of starting points in the anthology, and of its considerable resources for further discussion. I would not be surprised if this work becomes a central theological reference work for the next phase of research on religious freedom. The field of theology and religious freedom should be grateful to now have such a resource at its disposal.

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The first right: Freedom to religion. Freedom from religion

Jacob Rudenstrand

Freedom of religion series Vol. 10. Bonn: Culture and science Publ (VKW), 2026. 221 pp. ISBN 978-3862693351, free download from https://iirf.global/

Original title in Swedish: "Den första rättigheten: Frihet till Religion, frihet från Religion", Timbro Förlag, 2022.

If one doesn't count academic articles or government-commissioned committee investigations, only a handful of Swedish books focus on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in Sweden. About half of these are technical academic literature, leaving about three titles which are easily accessible to the general public. Rudenstrand's *The First Right* definitely made it onto this exclusive list when it was first published in Swedish in 2022, and with it, Rudenstrand also entered the rather small group of currently published FoRB experts in Sweden.

When the Swedish version appeared in 2022, it dealt with a number of highly relevant themes concerning FoRB, not only in Sweden but also in the broader contexts of Europe and the USA. Additionally, the book provides general background on FoRB as a human right and its development within Christianity. Even though Rudenstrand draws primarily on an American religious liberty tradition, these contributions carry relevance at a global level. In a balanced way, he portrays his own Christian faith and how it affects his perspective on FoRB, thus also contributing to a deepened theological reflection on FoRB from an evangelical perspective. All this was done in concise and readable yet nuanced Swedish. Combined with his thorough journalistic research, these traits made the book both highly relevant and accessible to the general public without becoming overly simplistic. While there were some minor blind spots – and I personally remain unconvinced by descriptions of FoRB as a first right – *Den första rättigheten* was a highly competent and balanced contribution on FoRB in Sweden, as well as on Sweden's tense relationship with religion and religious practice in general.

The translation of Rudenstrand's book thus offers a welcome contribution toward greater understanding of the Swedish and perhaps also the Scandinavian FoRB context. To many foreigners, our individualistic and sometimes "religiophobic" society may seem hard to interpret. *The First Right* helps to explain why things are as they are while also challenging the status quo. My major concern when picking up the English version was therefore whether a translation published in 2026 would remain on point.

In the last four years, the general and political debate on FoRB in Sweden, and perhaps also in Europe and the US, has changed radically and not in ways

that are necessarily constructive. Whereas Rudenstrand described FoRB in Sweden as a sidelined interest as of 2022, it has since entered the political centre stage with drama, high emotions and increased radicalization on several sides. During the 2026 election campaign, we have seen serious political suggestions regarding the banning of burqas and hijabs, as well as prohibitions on foreign funding coming from "extremist" religious actors for religious denominations in Sweden. From 2024 to 2026, the UN's special rapporteurs for FoRB, freedom of association, freedom of assembly, and human rights defenders, as well as the Swedish Human Rights Institute, have raised concerns about the increased vulnerability of Swedish religious and indigenous minorities and the country's shrinking civic space.[1]

The story of establishing democratic criteria to govern state funding of religious denominations and civil society, which Rudenstrand starts to tell in *The First Right*, has now been completed. The democratic criteria have been implemented despite strong criticism over risks of legal uncertainty and an actual undermining of FoRB and freedom of association from both religious denominations and secular civil society. According to Civil Rights Defenders, a Swedish human rights organization, similar criteria on private educational institutions have meant that since 2019 the majority of Muslim confessional schools in Sweden have been closed on opaque grounds.[2] Furthermore, an increasing body of academic research points towards a structural problem of defunding and deplatforming Swedish Muslim civil society organizations on grounds which raise questions of legal justification and proportionality.[3]

In 2026, Sweden, for the first time, showed up on the Pew Research Center list of countries with high social hostilities related to FoRB. To an even larger extent than in 2022, it can be argued that the term "Islamism" has lost its real meaning in the Swedish public debate, apart from the political and nationalistic purpose of creating a general association between Muslims and Islam as threats to Swedish national security and identity. Meanwhile, antisemitism is rising and cul-

1 UN Human Rights Council. Visit to Sweden – Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief. A/HRC/55/47/Add.2, 2 April 2024; Institutet för Mänsklaga Rättigheer, Årsrapport 2025, 3.1.1-465/2024, available at: https://tinyurl.com/4uwyk6np; Institutet för Mänsklaga Rättigheer, Årsrapport 2026, Årsrapport, 3.1.1-661/2025, available at: https://tinyurl.com/ys29us2a; "Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association," AL SWE 3/2026, public letter, 25 February 2026.

2 Kerstin Gustafsson Figueroa, "På Fem År Har 22 Muslimska Friskolor Stängts," Nyhetsbyrån Järva (Stockholdm Sweden), n.d., available at: https://tinyurl.com/53u2cybu. For an academic analysis, see also Abdi Hassan and Emin Poljarević, "Adjudicating Muslimness: Islamophobia and the Limits of Swedish Law," Islamophobic Studies Journal (Berkeley) 9, no. 2 (March 2026): 200-218. Available at: https://doi.org/10.13169/islastudj.9.2.0005.

3 Emin Poljarević and Amanj Azia, "Introduction: Sweden's Governance of Suspicion: Islamophobia and Conditional Belonging," Islamophobic Studies Journal (Berkeley) 9, No. 2 (March 2026): 138-141. Available at: https://doi.org/10.13169/islastudj.9.2.0001.

tural Christianity is increasingly wielded as a weapon by nationalist politicians. Unfortunately, similar developments can also be seen in other Western countries.

Consequently, while the themes dealt with in *The First Right* remain highly relevant and the book gives international readers valuable insight into FoRB's historical development in Sweden, as well as appreciated theological reflection, the English version would have greatly benefitted from an author's foreword to help readers situate the text in the present context. Without such guidance, some chapters are clearly outdated; more importantly, some of Rudenstrand's arguments and editorial choices may be interpreted by international readers in ways he never originally intended. Certain blind spots, such as failing to provide his own definition of Islamism, which could be seen as minor in 2022, could easily make the text appear more biased in today's political climate than Rudenstrand would have wanted.

Lastly, the machine translation of the book deserves comment. As noted above, Rudenstrand writes in a concise yet nuanced way in Swedish. He has an admirable talent for saying much with a few words, while still communicating nuance. Therefore, the use of a machine translation, unfortunately, does not do him justice. There are several annoying translation mistakes, and the English version remains heavy and technically complicated throughout. More extensive involvement of the skills of a human translator would have prevented important nuances from being lost in translation.

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The call to Islam (da'wa islamiyya): A brief history and contemporary approaches

Henning Wrogemann

Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2024, 228 pp., ISBN:†978-3374076260, €68

In this book, Henning Wrogemann, professor of religious studies and intercultural theology at the Protestant University Wuppertal, analyzes the historical evolution and current diversity of the concept of daʿwa and the associated ideas and trends of individual and social (re)Islamization.

As Wrogemann shows in the first chapter, daʿwa appears in the Qur'an primarily as an invitation or call from Allah, transmitted through prophets and messengers, to the exclusive worship of Allah and complete submission to His will. This internal daʿwa is justified above all by an instruction to the Islamic community to "enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong" (Sura 3:104). For

this reason, verse 110 of the same sura describes the Islamic *umma* as "the best community that has been raised up for mankind." The distinction between Muhammad's Meccan daʿwa (carried out in the context of an oppressed minority) and his Medinan daʿwa (carried out in the context of a ruling majority) seems particularly central to me. The related concept of phases and stages of Islamization established by legalistic Islamists has far-reaching implications when it comes to dealing with non-Muslims and the short- and long-term stance on issues of religious freedom and violence.

The significantly increased interest in the revival and systematization of daʿwa since the late 19th century is closely linked to the upheavals of the colonial era and competing reform movements (see chapter 2). For the 20th century, the author identifies defining trends via five key terms: politicization, internationalization, institutionalization, internalization, and universalization (79-81).

In Part III, on Sunni daʿwa theologies, the author contrasts the "reformist-organizational" approach of the Pakistani Muhammad Shafiq with the significantly more radical "revolutionary-procedural" model of the Pakistani-Indian activist Shamim Siddiqui, as well as the "purifying-individualistic" approach of the Saudi hadith scholar Rabi al-Madkhali and the "liberative-cooperative" (192) model of the South African theologian Farid Esack. In this way, the reader obtains a clear understanding of the spectrum of calls for "true" Islam, ranging from Islamist power-oriented approaches to Salafi purification and liberation theology hermeneutics.

Given its strong influence (also felt in Europe), it is not surprising that the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (MB), with its aim of permeating society in the most comprehensive manner possible, receives particular attention in the analysis (chapters 3 and 12). Among the reasons for its success, the author cites not only the mosque building but also the establishment of an independent social sector (including hospitals, schools, and public service facilities) and the targeted influence on professional associations and educational institutions, and later also on the banking and financial sectors.

Concerning is the ambivalent relationship still persisting today toward non-Muslims and violence, as well as the blurred historical transitions to militant groups that later split off from the Muslim Brotherhood. Wrogemann describes how they deliberately formulate vague goals and the great flexibility and adaptability of groups affiliated with the MB when it comes to the necessary adaptation to local political and social conditions (cf. 161-162). In my opinion, greater consideration could have been given here to the daʿwa and jihad approaches of Yusuf al-Qaradawi (1926-2022), who, for many, was the MB's unofficial chief ideologue for decades. He anticipated the peaceful, ideological conquest of a Europe

trapped in materialism and selfishness and called on Muslims to gradually infuse the diverse fields of Western education and science with an Islamic spirit.

With regard to jihadist groups, Wrogemann distinguishes between two strategies: those that, like the Tunisian Ansar al-Sharia, emphasize daʿwa more in the run-up to military conquest, and those that, like ISIS/IS, employ daʿwa after seizing military power. Since, in their thinking, the formation of a community and purification are followed by a withdrawal – rooted in Muhammad's emigration (Hijra) from Mecca to Medina – from societies deemed unbelieving, and ultimately by armed struggle to establish an Islamic state, they fundamentally rule out long-term "peaceful coexistence in a plural society" (176).

Wrogemann also analyzes how Saudi Arabia uses daʿwa as an instrument of global "soft power." He considers the current social reforms to be "quite reversible" (154) due to the continuing centralization of power and Wahhabi authority structures. Furthermore, he observes a wide gap between official announcements and actual practice – for example, when it comes to restricting foreign funding of mosques. The author also provides insight into the various orientations of so-called "star preachers" of a popular form of Salafism. He classifies television and internet preachers and apologists such as Amr Khaled, Zakir Naik, and Abdullah Gymnastiar as having a "neoliberal religious orientation" (190).

The concluding chapter leaves no doubt that Islamist and jihadist variants, in particular, pose a threat to human rights, minority rights, and the future of Western democracies. The author attributes their dominance primarily to a lack of historical-critical scholarship regarding their own sources and history. Following Majid Daneshgar and Aaron W. Hughes, he also sees a danger at Western universities of intimidation and defamation of voices critical of Islam, as well as the displacement of historical-critical Islamic studies by Islamic apologetics and "religiously inspired activism" (199) – for example, through chairs sponsored by Gulf states.

For Wrogemann, one of the necessary prerequisites for scholarly, historical-critical research is that even religious texts be viewed "exclusively as a product of human communication" and with an "attitude of religious and ideological neutrality" (197). This strikes me as highly unlikely, and not just for the broad spectrum of Islamic theology. After all, even Christian theologians and secular scholars do not approach biblical and Qur'anic texts without any presuppositions. In my view, scholarly integrity and the capacity for dialogue should be demonstrated above all through the disclosure of and methodological reflection on one's own presuppositions and through a peaceful, objective and reasoned engagement with those who raise critical questions – whether intra- or interreligiously – regarding religious texts and traditions. However, prevailing Islamic

discourses on apostasy and blasphemy continue to pose a formidable obstacle to such an open discourse.

One can only hope that political, social, and church leaders will adopt a nuanced understanding of the complex world of da'wa and speak out with well-founded arguments whenever interpretations of Islam are disseminated in the name of religious freedom that, in the medium or long term, delegitimize that very religious freedom (and numerous other human rights). With his analysis, Wrogemann provides an important and highly timely guide in this regard.

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