

In Others' Words

Editor's Note: In this department, we highlight resources outside of the IJFM: other journals, print resources, DVDs, web sites, blogs, videos, etc. Standard disclaimers on content apply. Due to the length of many web addresses, we sometimes give just the title of the resource, the main web address, or a suggested search phrase.

Atheist Muslim: An Oxymoron?

From the missiology blog *Circumpolar* authored by Warrick Farah come some reflections on a *Vox* interview entitled, “An Atheist Muslim: What the Left and Right Get Wrong about Islam.” The *Vox* conversation is between a journalist and Ali Rizvi, author of the new book *The Atheist Muslim*. The actual interview has some observations by Rizvi that could have possible implications for other types of Muslims who might embrace the culture, heritage, and identity of Islam but not the religious tenets of the faith.

Secularization, a Pathway to Faith?

There seem to be many atheist Muslims becoming followers of Jesus, just as has happened among the Communist Chinese. In a Mission Network News (March 15, 2018) article entitled “Secularization: An Unexpected Friend to the Gospel,” Christian Aid’s David Bogosian observes:

Many who become Christian don’t go directly from Islam to Christianity. They go from Islam to agnosticism to atheism and then to Christianity. So, a huge number of people that are coming into the church have first been secularized.

The author of the article, Beth Stolicker, goes on to say,

This is going on all over the [Muslim] world in places like Iran, Turkey, and Libya. Basically, any place that’s experienced or has been affected by radical Islam or Islamic extremists... [People are] questioning their faiths and the ideas which have served as foundations for their lives.

See also the accompanying article about [an increase in persecution of Algerian Christians](#). (Our thanks for these sources goes to [missionscatalyst.net](#).)

Religious Persecution Obscures Underlying Fears of Defilement

Persecution of Christians and other religious minorities in Pakistan has risen to new levels of cruelty because of the notorious “Blasphemy Laws.” Farahnaz Ispahani, a former member of the Pakistani parliament, explains the origin of these laws and profiles the case of Catholic Pakistani mother Asia Bibi in an eye-opening CNN article (March 1, 2018) entitled, “Pakistan’s Blasphemy Laws Persecute the Weakest of the Weak.” A Christian, Bibi was harvesting berries with Muslim women who were offended that she had defiled them by drinking water out of the same cup. (Many Christians in Pakistan and India were originally

Hindu Dalits.) So, instead they accused her of blaspheming the prophet and she was arrested. Ispahani, who was on the Human Rights Committee while in parliament, states:

Assertion by a Muslim witness that blasphemy was committed is sufficient for filing of charges and arrest of a suspect—even without corroborating evidence... Worse still, once blasphemy is alleged, mob violence or targeted killing becomes a possibility. According to researcher Mohammed Nafees, from 1990–2011, there were over 50 cases “wherein blasphemy suspects were either extrajudicially murdered or died in jail.” ... Lawyers who dare to represent someone accused of blasphemy have also been killed.

Al-Jazeera reported last August 2017 that Pakistan’s Supreme Court is attempting revisions of the blasphemy laws. But if, as in Bibi’s case, the underlying offense had to do with defilement because of caste or community, who is going to revise those laws?

For a disturbing but beautifully written novel about contemporary Pakistan that takes on hard subjects such as mob violence, caste, and Muslim hatred of Christian minorities, don’t miss *The Golden Legend* by Nadeem Aslam. It is also suffused with a love for beauty—art, architecture, and literature. (See the [book review](#) in the *Washington Post* April 2017).

Is Social Ranking the New Face of Big Brother?

Will believers in China be ostracized on social media, unable to rent houses, receive loans, or get visas to travel because their every word, purchase, or action has been tracked? Read “[Inside China’s Vast New Experiment with Social Ranking](#),” an article in *Wired* (Dec 14, 2017):

The aim is for every Chinese citizen to be trailed by a file compiling data from public and private sources by 2020, and for those files to be searchable by fingerprints and other biometric characteristics. The State Council calls it a “credit system that covers the whole society.” For the Chinese Communist Party, social credit is an attempt at a softer, more invisible authoritarianism. The goal is to nudge people toward behaviors ranging from energy conservation to obedience to the Party.

The Noose Tightens Further for Chinese Christians

As mentioned in our last IOW in an entry entitled “[Controversial Vatican–China Agreement](#),” discussions between the Communist government have gone forward with the Vatican acceding the authority to China to actually appoint Catholic bishops. Now the Chinese government has taken an additional step and has detained one of the most well-known Catholic bishops just before Easter services. This move clearly signals that no bishop can conduct services unless officially appointed by the Communist government. This increasingly troubling accommodation on the part of the Vatican is described in the following excellent March 30 article in the *Atlantic*: “[This Is Making A Lot of Christians in China Very Nervous](#).” Also, as a sign of more restrictions, Bibles can no longer be listed for sale publicly on the

internet. They've been banned for years in bookstores, but this loophole has just been closed. CNN has the details in its April 5th story "[Bibles Pulled From Online Stores as China Increases Control of Religion](#)." The *New York Times* also reported this and comments on the status of a number of different religions in China: "[China Bans Online Bible Sales As It Tightens Controls on Religions](#)."

Get Your Weekly China News Fix

For a weekly comprehensive list of curated articles about China from over 50 periodicals, see the *ZGBriefs* on China Source's website: <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/zgbriefs/zgbriefs-march-29-2018>. Articles cover politics, missions, culture and much more. The site also includes translations of important articles written by Chinese authors.

Still Blood Brothers?

Lebanese theologian Martin Accad has written a very perceptive response to a scathing indictment of American evangelicals' influence on US foreign policy penned by a former Lebanese ambassador to the US. See his February 15th post: "[American Evangelical Influence on US Foreign Policy and How It Impacts Us as Middle East Christians](#)." Accad is both the director of the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary's Institute for Middle East and North African Studies as well as an Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at the Beirut seminary. Also from the IMES blog, don't miss the poignant lament for the fate of all Syrians, "[Syria Brief: Hope is Lost. Still, We Have One Chance Left. The Living Hope](#)." The *April 2018 IMES' Regional Brief* reflects theologically on what's happening in the whole area. Check this out for updates on Syria, the persecution of Algerian Christians, the violence and assault on women in South Sudan, and the uneasy political atmosphere in Egypt, among other things.

What If Half of Your Country's Population Were Refugees?

So far in 2018, an additional 700,000 Syrians have been internally displaced. This brings the total number of Syrian refugees—both internal (6.5 m.) and external (5.6 m.)—to [over half of the entire Syrian population](#) with pre-war population numbers estimated at [22 million people](#). (See the April 10th statement by Moutiz on [reliefweb.int](#).) This makes Syrians the [largest refugee population](#) in the world. For an excellent report about which countries are hosting the most Syrian refugees, read the January 29, 2018 Pew Research Fact Tank, "Most Displaced Syrians are in the Middle East and About a Million are in Europe": <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/29/where-displaced-syrians-have-resettled/>. For a concise summary of what Syrian refugees will need in order to ever return home, read BBC's "[Syrian Refugees: the People who Want Four Things Before They Go Home](#)," April 6, 2018. Many articles and sermons have reminded us of our responsibility as followers of Jesus to the refugee, the immigrant, the

asylum-seeker. There is a great summary in the youth magazine *Relevant* called "[What the Bible Says About How to Treat Refugees](#)."

A Brutal Military Mop-Up Called "Operation Olive Branch"

Are we ready for new permutations of political and religious movements in the Muslim world? Scott Peterson, in the *Christian Science Monitor*, explores such a development in the rationale behind Turkey's military operation in Syria, ironically called "Operation Olive Branch." In an article entitled, "[Turkey's 'Holy War' in Syria Puts a More Religious Nationalism on Display](#)," Peterson writes that

never before has an operation by Turkey's military—the second-largest army in the NATO alliance, with a fiercely secular tradition—been wrapped in such overtly religious language. . . . "You do have a combination—a nexus of Islamism and Turkish nationalism—that has not existed before," says Istanbul-based Asli Aydintaşbaş, a Turkey expert at the European Council on Foreign Relations. "It resonates. And the moment you define it as a religious war, you have no sympathy for the people on the other side. They're the enemy. They are terrorists. They are not innocent."

For more information on the repercussions of Turkey's military assault against the Syrian Kurds, see the *Daily Mail's* March 18th article, "[What Does Turkey's Seizure of Afrin Mean for Syria's War?](#)" In a chilling article written by Turkish journalist Uzay Buluth, readers are reminded of Turkey's brutal methods of ethnic cleansing in Northern Cyprus in 1974: "[From Cyprus to Syria: Turkey's Continued Invasions](#)," (*Providence*, February 21, 2018). Will this be repeated in Syria? For an explanation of why Turkey (a US ally) is now fighting the Syrian Kurds (who are US allies in the fight against ISIS), see "[The Entirely Rational Basis for Turkey's Move Into Syria](#)" in the *Atlantic*, January 22, 2018.

American Pastor, Andrew Brunson, Goes on Trial with Life Sentence Hanging Over His Head . . . Pray for His Complete Vindication and Imminent Release

An American pastor who has been held in a Turkish prison for a year and a half on trumped-up charges of espionage was indicted on March 21st, 2018. His trial, which began April 16th with the prosecutor asking for life imprisonment, was postponed after just two days until May 7th. (See *Christianity Today's* update "[US Officials Stand with American Pastor in Terrorism Trial](#)," April 17th, 2018.) For an explanation of what's really behind this—including Turkey's demand that a Muslim cleric in exile in the US be handed over in exchange—see "[Turkey: Date Set for Trial of US Pastor Andrew Brunson](#)" in *World Watch Monitor*, March 21, 2018. **IJFM**