

## Routledge Handbook of Law and Religion

Edited by SILVIO FERRARI

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Professor Ferrari has assembled an international panel of 26 legal and non-legal academics to contribute chapters to this wide-ranging work of reference. Weighing in at £138, however, the book may appear beyond the budget of all but the serious specialist buyer, albeit there is plenty to appeal to those who can find a library copy.

The back cover of this handbook describes it as ‘essential reading for students, researchers and scholars of law and religion, as well as policy makers in the field’. If that carries some implication that it may cover most that is going on in law and religion, that would inevitably be an unrealistic aspiration. A book of this nature and size cannot, of course, cover the whole range of scholarship on law and religion, albeit a perusal of bibliographies and footnotes will throw up the names of most of the leading writers in the field, even if they have not authored a chapter. Although it is not immediately apparent from the title, a footnote on page 3 of the book also makes it clear that it is not intended to cover the internal law of religious communities but rather the external regulation of religion and its manifestations, or ‘religion law’ (as opposed to ‘religious law’).

Professor Malcolm Evans is quoted on the cover and at the front of the book as suggesting that it ‘not only synthesises and systemises that body of scholarship, but firmly anchors it within those broader interdisciplinary frameworks’. Professor Ferrari’s 14-page introductory chapter largely justifies that description, with a reflective overview of the increasing importance of law and religion in recent decades, which he dates from the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran in 1979. He identifies the emergence of a new field or ‘global brand’ of law and religion (albeit building on scholastic traditions in countries such as Italy and Germany), with an increasing number of specialist journals, books and university courses. Interestingly, he identifies some scepticism among non-legal scholars as to whether lawyers (with their focus on providing solutions to practical problems) are capable of grasping all the complexities of law and religion relations. While welcoming the contribution of dialogues with other disciplines (such as anthropologists and sociologists), Professor Ferrari is plainly of the view that lawyers are up to the task, although ‘it is a long journey, which is only just beginning’ (p 5). The overview and context he provides to the emerging themes is full of insight, and does not disappoint: I would have welcomed even more of his analysis, but it is perhaps in the nature of a handbook of this type that the bulk of the work should be devoted to individual authors.

Professor Ferrari has divided the handbook into four parts, though this is necessarily an aid to ordering the subject, rather than covering discrete areas

of study. For example, chapters relating to religious discrimination fall within both ‘freedom of religion’ issues and also ‘state and society’ issues. The parts comprise: ‘Interdisciplinary perspectives on law and religion’, ‘Freedom of religion or belief as a human right: critical reflections’, ‘Law, religion, state and society’ and ‘Controversial issues’. There are too many chapters to name-check the contributors (readers will need to obtain their own copy), but a summary of the themes provides a flavour for the scope of the book. The first part covers the biblical background and the context of the Western legal tradition, and moves on to consider the relevance of anthropological and sociological approaches, as well as interdisciplinary conversations more broadly. The longer second part, comprising nine chapters, recognises the importance that freedom of religion and belief has acquired within the study of law and religion, looking at different examples and different models of research.

The third part then deals with the relationship between religion and the state, with the initial chapter considering the changing relationships within religious-centred or secular states. The other chapters in this part address specific topics relating to the challenges faced within family law, education, the workplace, economic development and bioethics. The fourth and final part of the book picks up on six controversial areas (not that it can be said that the preceding chapters are afraid to confront controversial issues – far from it), with attempts to find viable solutions to difficult problems. These cover various topics such as gender, security, religious symbols, freedom of expression (and blasphemy etc) and proselytism. I was a little surprised that the thorny issue of religion and sexual orientation did not merit a chapter of its own; the topic is briefly touched upon in the ‘gender’ chapter, and, for example, in an earlier chapter dealing with human rights, which considers the position of Ms Ladele in the Strasbourg case of *Eweida and Others v the United Kingdom*. That is, however, a minor criticism: a 426-page handbook cannot cover every topic, and individual chapters will necessarily reflect the particular research interests of contributors.

Overall, this is a book which I would recommend to anyone with an interest in law and religion. Those who want a good overview of the scope of the subject and current issues (albeit absent the internal law of organised religions) should at the very least read Professor Ferrari’s introduction. The following 26 chapters provide an invaluable resource for those wishing to delve into particular topics in greater depth. Is it ‘essential reading’, as proclaimed on the cover? Yes, it probably is, but very much as a starting point, rather than the last word on the subject.

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