

doubt about the pogrom that was conducted in the city under Nero's watch' (p. 38), and 'no reason in principle to doubt the claim that both apostles met a violent death in Rome' (p. 39), but there was 'no comprehensive persecution of Christians during the reign of Domitian (p. 43). The period 111–249 CE (chapter 5) does not know of 'empire-wide persecutions' and Christians are mostly 'victims of local police actions' (p. 45), within the limits imposed by two imperial rescripts, one by Trajan and one by Hadrian. Marcus Aurelius, presented as a 'devotee of Stoic philosophy', lets the situation deteriorate, as illustrated by the martyrdoms of Justin, Polycarp and the martyrs of Lyon. With the Severans, the situation improves except for two 'hot spots of Christian persecution' (p. 69): Alexandria in Egypt, and North Africa with the execution of Perpetua, Felicitas and their companions. The reign of Decius inaugurates the period of empire-wide persecutions divided into the decade 250–60 (chapter 6) and the Great Persecution of Diocletian (chapter 7). The persecutions end as they started: through the decision of an emperor. Though readers are warned against the 'adulatory exuberance' (p. 140) of the Christian sources towards Constantine, they are not offered any alternative explanation.

In addition to these narrative chapters, Kinzig offers four much shorter chapters. Chapter 2 presents the 'Ideological Parameters of the Ancient Conflicts': why Christianity was offensive to pagans and how Christians responded to their attacks. Chapter 3 describes 'Legal Procedures and Punishments'; this chapter is an addition for the English translation and emphasises the cruelty of the tortures inflicted upon Christian martyrs. Chapter 8 dedicates two pages to 'later repressions against certain groups of Christians who had been identified as schismatics' (p. 125). These 'tensions' within the empire turn into 'outright persecutions' (p. 126) outside of it. Thus, chapter 9 evokes the persecutions among the Goths, the Sassanians (Persia) and in Armenia and Georgia. Chapter 10 deals with the 'massive problem for the churches' (p. 133) of the many apostates, i.e., Christians who did not remain steadfast.

Overall, Kinzig's presentation of the Christian tradition on the Roman persecutions is a quick read, much shorter with its 173 in-octavo pages than Frensdorff's *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (1965, with numerous reprints). The question of it being up to date is irrelevant, since critical scholarship is ignored.

doi:10.1017/S0036930622000576

## **Alexis Torrance, *Human Perfection in Byzantine Theology: Attaining the Fullness of Christ***

**(Oxford: OUP, 2020), pp. xiii + 239. £65.00/\$85.00**

Kevin Kalish

Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, MA, USA ([kkalish@bridgew.edu](mailto:kkalish@bridgew.edu))

Alexis Torrance's *Human Perfection in Byzantine Theology* is not simply a book on historical theology. Rather, Byzantine theology, with its focus on the humanity of Christ and deification in Christ, is used as a corrective to trends in modern Orthodox theology.

Three areas of modern Orthodox theology are singled out: 1) concepts of personhood; 2) deification (especially *epektasis* or perpetual progress; 3) the essence–energies distinction. Torrance calls for a paradigm shift in how Orthodox theology proceeds, one that is rooted more firmly in the Byzantine theological tradition, while also engaging with contemporary issues. This approach clearly follows in the footsteps of Georges Florovsky, and Torrance defends the neo-patristic synthesis from its recent detractors.

Chapter 2 challenges the popular conception of ‘eternal progress’ as it is used in modern Orthodox theology. Torrance argues that the idea of progress, as used in the patristic sources, refers to the spiritual life here and now, not the eschaton. In this context, he argues that the notion of ‘ever-moving rest’ is peripheral to the thought of Maximus the Confessor. Growth, development or progress occur in this age, but these undergo a ‘sabbatification’ in the age to come (p. 64). For Maximus, deification means the sharing by grace in the divine state, which is beyond our terms of motion and rest. For Torrance it therefore may in fact be better to talk about ‘ever-dynamic rest’ (p. 74).

It may come as a surprise to find Theodore the Studite here; as Torrance does throughout, here, too, he seeks to upend the received view and uncover elements in Theodore’s writings as they relate to the human ideal. It is indeed Theodore’s very practical, down-to earth approach that is important for Torrance. According to Theodore, there is no abstract or generic human nature ‘separate from individual human beings’ (p. 88). Ultimately, for Theodore, as for Maximus, what Christ accomplishes is something more than just reconciliation. Indeed, human nature ‘is now enthroned “above the heavens”’ (p. 100). For Theodore, human perfection requires not a relinquishing of human nature, but is found ‘*in the abiding humanity of Christ*’ (p. 108).

Symeon the New Theologian has not suffered from a lack of attention; nonetheless, Torrance argues that insufficient attention has been paid to Symeon’s understanding of the human ideal, which is grounded in his christology. Torrance does not go so far as to call Symeon’s views personalist, but he notes ‘Symeon’s appeal to the Father-Son relationship’ as constituting a ‘wide-ranging hermeneutical key for understanding the human ideal’ (p. 149). For Symeon the call to human perfection in the fullness of Christ allows little room for those half-hearted efforts that Torrance calls the ‘heresy of mediocrity’ (p. 110). Furthermore, the transformed existence of the believer, who consciously experiences grace here and now, is further witness to the full meaning of God becoming a human being. As a result, Symeon can even claim that human nature surpasses angelic nature, because those who experience divine grace become bearers of Christ’s divinity and holiness. Importantly, Symeon links ecclesiastical doctrine to lived perfection, and Symeon’s mysticism cannot be separated from his active role in cenobitic monasticism.

Chapter 5, which focuses on Gregory Palamas, more firmly connects to issues raised in chapter 1 concerning trends in modern Orthodox thought, since the thought of Palamas looms large in twentieth-century Orthodox theology, in which the essence–energy distinction has served as something of a ‘hermeneutical key’ (p. 152). Torrance is not advocating a paradigm shift here, but rather arguing that the concept of deification by uncreated grace ‘allows Palamas’s understanding of the attainment of the human ideal by divine energy to be more broadly contextualized than is often the case’ (p. 153). Contrary to anti-Palamite arguments from both the fourteenth century and the present, Torrance claims that the humanity of Christ serves as a ‘locus ... through which the uncreated and deifying energy of God is communicated and received in the created order’ (p. 153). To make this argument, Torrance first recaps the hesychast controversy and the anti-Palamite challenge. To rebut anti-Palamite criticisms, Torrance demonstrates through an analysis of the *Triads*, as well as other writings,

that for Palamas knowledge of God through uncreated divine energy is ‘a thoroughly Christ-centered affair’ (p. 176). In particular, Torrance highlights Palamas’ frequent discussion of the ‘worshipped body’ (p. 152 and *passim*) of Christ.

The conclusion explores how a controversy in late twelfth-century Byzantium over the verse, ‘my Father is greater than I’ (John 14:28) reveals an abiding concern with the humanity of Christ. The final portion of the conclusion, however, heads in a quite different direction. Fr John Behr’s theological works are singled out for their christocentric approach, in line with Torrance’s reading of the Byzantine tradition and in contrast to modern trends. At the same time, Torrance pushes back against the negative juxtaposition of theology and history in Behr’s works. In the end, Torrance’s criticism of Behr’s work comes down to method; one wonders, though, what makes the ‘literary analysis’ (p. 214) that Torrance identifies with Behr a faulty approach? It comes as a surprising criticism, given that the book frequently invokes the need for careful and close reading of the sources, which is itself a form of literary analysis. Even with this minor objection, Torrance’s *Human Perfection in Byzantine Theology* is a remarkable and thorough analysis of a central tenet in Byzantine theology. The range and depth of sources is impressive, and Torrance often sheds new light on familiar texts while bringing unfamiliar texts to our attention. Truly the neo-patristic synthesis remains a viable and fruitful method.

doi:10.1017/S0036930622000448

## **Katja Voges, *Religionsfreiheit im christlich-muslimischen Dialog: Optionen für ein christlich motiviertes und dialogorientiertes Engagement***

**(Zurich: TVZ, 2021), pp. 383. CHF 50.00/€ 44.00**

Aaron Langenfeld

Theologische Fakultät Paderborn, Paderborn, Germany ([a.langenfeld@thf-paderborn.de](mailto:a.langenfeld@thf-paderborn.de))

In light of ongoing global conflicts between religious groups and discrimination against religious or ideological minorities, the issue of religious freedom is highly relevant.

The present study, which was submitted and accepted as a doctoral dissertation in the Department of Missiology at the Philosophical-Theological University in Vallendar (Germany) in the winter term of 2019–20, is devoted to an understanding of religious freedom in Christian–Islamic dialogue and thus addresses a twofold problem: a dialogical one, insofar as it is about mutual interreligious recognition and thus about a concession of religious freedom; and a logical one, insofar as the question of a theological basis for a common advocacy of religious freedom is posed. Especially the second point is in the foreground of the study, although the first aspect is also included with regard to positionings within the field of theology of religions.

Chapter 1 thematises religious freedom as a universal human right by outlining central historical developments and normative contents. Methodologically, the concrete theological reflection is preceded by a general hermeneutical investigation of the