

Even readers in the grip of the same spirit-sapping emotions as Ferdinand Bardamu will find reasons to keep turning the pages as they make the journey to the end of *A Secular Age*.

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Christianity and Law: An Introduction

EDITED BY JOHN WITTE, JR AND FRANK S ALEXANDER

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008 xvi + 343pp (hardback £45)
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The preface by John Witte Jr states that –

This volume provides an authoritative introduction to some of the legal teachings of Western Christian tradition – as set out in the texts and traditions of Scripture and theology, philosophy and jurisprudence. The sixteen chapters that follow address ‘the weightier matters of the law’ (Matthew 25:23) – justice and mercy, rule and equity, discipline and love. They also address some of the technical topics of canon law and natural law, conscience and commandment, contract and promise, evidence and proof, marriage and family, crime and punishment, property and poverty, liberty and dignity, church and state, business and commerce. (p xiv)

Putting aside the unfortunate typographical error (the quotation is from Matthew 23:23) this preface underscores my difficulty with this volume. Some of the articles are superb: see, for example, the excellent chapter by David Novak entitled ‘Law and religion in Judaism’. On the other hand, one wonders why the chapters by William Bassett on ‘Religious organizations and the state: the laws of ecclesiastical polity and the civil courts’ and by David A. Skeel, Jr on ‘Christianity and the large-scale corporation’, however distinguished the authors may be, were included in a book that holds itself out as ‘an authoritative *introduction* to some of the legal *teachings* of the Western Christian tradition’ (reviewer’s emphasis). One is left with the uneasy feeling that various prestigious authors may have been approached to write chapters but then editorial rigour was lacking when the chapters (or their suggested titles) were actually received. Hence the final, all-embracing

sentence in the quotation set out above. This is in spite of an introduction by John Witte, Jr himself that goes some way to draw the various chapters together.

This is not in any way to denigrate the fascinating contributions of many of the authors, although any reader is bound to have his or her own particular areas of interest, expertise and enquiry. I have already singled out the chapter by David Novak, which is very balanced. Indeed, his concluding insight into the contrast between the greater privatization of Jewish law during the diaspora and the situation in the State of Israel where 'both Jewish law and Jewish religion are matters of public significance' (p 52) leaves an appetite for more. The chapter on 'Law in early Christianity' by Luke Timothy Johnson gives an interesting insight into the change from Jewish law into the distinctive legal contributions of early Christianity and leads well into the following chapter on 'Western canon law' by RH Helmholz, which covers not only the early developments but also the period from the Protestant reformation to the present day. The contribution on 'Natural law and natural rights' by Brian Tierney is then a natural extension. Thereafter, in addition to the two already mentioned, there are chapters on conscientious objection and civil disobedience (Kent Greenawalt), Christian sources of general contract law (Harold J Berman), procedure and evidence (Mathias Schmoeckel), family law (Don S Browning), poverty and social welfare (Brian S Pullan), property (Frank S Alexander), punishment (Jeffrie G Murphy), human rights (Michael J Perry), religious liberty (David Little) and modern church law (Norman Doe).

It is perhaps inevitable that some of the contributions will be variable in content and their breadth is such that some are bound to appeal more to some than to others. For this reason it is less a book to read from cover to cover than for consultation on particular topics. Nonetheless there will be few readers who do not come away having learned more and having been inspired to think more deeply on the past and continuing impact of Christianity on the law.

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Religious Discrimination and Hatred Law

NEIL ADDISON

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I found this book a good and informative read. I would recommend it, provided one is aware of its limitations. The book seeks to introduce the law on religious