



Religious Freedom

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Reviewer:

[David Self](#) [3]

Not on Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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To a large extent, this is a survey of the unpleasant things ?people of faith? have done to each other in the names of their religions.

After a couple of introductory chapters, the author adopts an historical structure. He begins with the Middle Ages: ?Religious freedom was rarely practised.? We are then taken on a hectic tour through the iniquities of the Inquisition followed by the turmoil, bloodshed and savagery resulting from the Reformation. Later, we are introduced to anti-Semitism (not only in Nazi Germany), the racism of colonialism and the current ?backlash against Islam?.

Interspersed within this depressing story are case studies of religious tolerance. Shinto (the state religion of Japan) honoured other faiths. Religious freedom underpinned the creation of the United States of America. Earlier, the often brutish Mughal Empire had allowed Hinduism to co-exist with Islam in the Indian sub-continent.

Modern controversies are not shirked. A panel explores the row surrounding the publication of Salman Rushdie?s **The Satanic Verses** (a ?mixture of comedy, fantasy and philosophy?). Others pose questions such as whose rights are affected by abortion and whether Rastafarians should be allowed to pursue their ?religious ceremony? of smoking marijuana.

It is absolutely fair and proper that an author and a publisher should place such issues in front of young people. In the hands of a gifted mediator, able to amplify the historical backgrounds, this will be a useful resource. Whether so many and such fraught and complex issues can be properly covered within such a slim volume is more debatable.

Running Order:

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