

Part Five provides us with the author's own view. Echoing the philosophers' difficulties with criteria of identity and continuity in the notion of survival, Corner adopts a more Kantian notion of the limits of experience and a more Barthian notion of the overcoming of death by being taken into God's eternity.

The book concludes with a brief, clear, summary of the argument that permits the reader to appreciate both the strengths and the possible weaknesses of the author's position. My own reservations concern his excessively Kantian reading of Barth, especially on the topic of time. After all, Kant's view of the transcendental ideality of space and time is not really a tenable notion, and Barth's view of God's time as something analogous to our time might permit a conception of life 'after' death rather than just life 'beyond' death. In other words there is a sense in which God's eternity can be thought itself to contain futurity. Certainly life 'after' death should not be thought of as a continuation of this life in the same dimension of this world's space/time. But there is a certain over-literalism in restricting the sense of the word 'after' in this way. So I would recommend closer reflection on the notion of God's time, as found in the writings of Barth, Balthasar and Pannenberg.

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THE VERY STONES CRY OUT. THE PERSECUTED CHURCH: PAIN, PASSION AND PRAISE, by Caroline Cox and Benedict Rogers, *Continuum*, London, 2011, pp. 150, £19.95, pbk

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM. RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION AND CONFLICT IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, by Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke, *Cambridge University Press*, Cambridge, 2011, pp. 257, £19.99, pbk

In recent times newspapers and other mass media have frequently reported harassment and persecution that Christians of various denominations have suffered. Most cases have come from the Middle East and Far East, as well as from Africa. Here is an apparently new social phenomenon which was absent in the news items that appeared in the years that immediately followed World War II. In decades before then there were reports of persecution in Soviet Russia, and before that, during the time of World War I, there was wide coverage of what were held to be the Armenian massacres. Today the position has changed radically and the flood of reports covering religious persecution shows no sign of abating. Although Christians appear to be bearing the brunt of the current oppression, members of other religious groups, Hindus, Muslims and the Baha'i have all suffered physical violence and harassment. Such sufferings even occur in a country whose constitution is secular and which allows freedom of religious expression of many kinds, as is the case of India for example. Of course history has shown that there has always been persecution but persecution tends to come in waves.

It is in no way surprising that Christian bodies in countries around the world that are free from religious harassment, have attempted to lighten the burdens of their fellow persecuted believers. Help of various kinds has been forthcoming to alleviate their sufferings. Money, moral encouragement, political intervention have all been employed. In recent times societies of international calibre in Britain, such as Barnabas Fund and Christian Solidarity Worldwide, have come into existence for that very purpose.

Numbers of questions arise over this current upsurge of persecution. They are questions that thinking people would raise, whether they be religiously minded or humanistically inclined. They cover such issues as the 'causes' of persecution, what tends to accelerate persecution or brings about a decline, the kinds of

responses the persecuted make to their situation and the effect of persecution upon those who so suffer. The fact is that these wider issues relating to persecution have not engaged the academic mind. There has been a complete absence of studies of persecution in general, apart from historical accounts of particular persecutions.

There have been famous studies of Christians persecuted on many occasions. One recalls the work of W.H.C. Frend, H.C. Lea and of course, Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, to name just a few. And there have been studies of orthodox Christians persecuting the unorthodox, such as the Cathars and later the Quakers. Sociologists, however, find it more to their liking to study Pentecostalism than persecution. A little time ago Zygmunt Bauman, himself a sociologist, condemned sociologists for ignoring the Holocaust. And some historians, for example, R.I. Moore, have pointed to the failure of historians to consider persecution as a subject in itself.

It is encouraging to discover that at long last the subject of contemporary persecution has begun to be addressed by the publication of two books. They are, nonetheless, very different in their approach to the subject. The one wants to stir the consciences of Christians in appealing to their sympathies towards fellow Christians and those of other beliefs, suffering from oppression in various parts of the world. The book offers dramatic first-hand accounts of how people are suffering for their faith, in the face of hostility. There is little that is strictly historical or sociological here. The other book is aimed at the intellectual who wishes to understand some of the social dynamics of persecution as it is carried out at the present time. The approach is objective and 'scientific' in which the feelings of the sufferers is little to the fore. The findings of this book, as one would expect, can appeal to the humanist as much as to those holding to the same basic beliefs as the sufferers.

Baroness Caroline Cox, one of the authors of the first book under consideration, has become an international figure through her early work in bringing relief to the oppressed in Europe and other parts of the world in the 1980s. She is now the head of an organisation called HART which attempts, amongst other things, to relieve Christians suffering persecution. Her observations based on visits to countries where persecution has been taking place now appear in a book we have just referred to, *The Very Stones Cry Out*. In 17 chapters, where each relates to a separate country, Cox and her co-writer, Benedict Rogers, show how Christians and members of other faiths have been and are facing harassment, assault and far worse. Cox and Rogers, in often short chapters, vividly show the bravery and steadfastness of those molested for their religious convictions. Worshipers and devotees have been beaten with iron bars, their churches burnt down, their houses demolished, they have been taken to prison and never heard of again, they have been tortured in police cells, families have been split up, widows, who have lost their spouses by police action, have been forced to bring up children in poor housing and with little money. There is one case of a believer having had molten metal poured over him. Such cruel and sad stories have appeared alongside the accounts of those who refused to deny their beliefs. Cathedrals and house churches, large buildings and back street chapels, have all suffered, as well as the homes of believers themselves.

Of course, the levels of persecution at the present time vary from country to country, though no attempt has been made to measure them. However, the worst countries for oppression that are considered, would appear to be Eritrea, North Korea (particularly), Iran and Vietnam. Further, with no statistical facts to back the proposition, the cases of oppression as they appear in the reports are more apparent within small Protestant churches than in the major denominations. Unregistered house churches seem particularly vulnerable. Nevertheless the present situation is made fluid with the changes of government in various states, such as

those along the north African coast. The Copts in Egypt are particularly worried about their future.

The other book, dealing with sociological factors in contemporary persecution, is that of Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke in their book of 2011, *The Price of Freedom Denied. Religious Persecution and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century*. Grim is a senior researcher in religion and world affairs at the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life in Washington, D.C. Finke is professor of sociology and religious studies at Pennsylvania State University and also Director of the Association of Religion Data Archives. The authors thus have at their fingertips a vast amount of information on contemporary persecution and it is on this that they draw to test their propositions.

The particular sociological approach that Grim and Finke adopt is one that attempts to discover what social factors influence persecution. This is achieved through statistical analysis of a sophisticated kind. They are concerned with one form of persecution, namely violent religious persecution, and by it, they mean 'physical displacement or physical abuse due to religion' (p. 77). Murder, torture, imprisonment, and being forced to leave one's country, come most commonly to mind. This definition of persecution does not take into account lesser forms of persecution, such as the paying of fines or taxes, being prohibited to take up certain occupations, or attending a university, etc. The possibilities of such prohibitions are numberless.

One variable factor Grim and Finke concentrate on is the level of religious freedom found in a particular country and its effect on believers. Obviously, the existence of freedom allows them, at least theoretically, to practise their religion unmolested. Grim and Finke, however, prefer to use the word freedoms and base their position on the famous Article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the UN. Here freedom is spelt out in a number of ways. This appeal to the 1948 Declaration is usually upheld by all Western countries as a first principle, but many countries outside the west do not accept it or pay it only lip service. Muslims do not accept the UN declaration as being a universal principle.

Grim and Finke strongly emphasise the fact that religious freedom and therefore persecution are frequently entangled with non-religious elements such as a local politics or a wider political ideology. This raises difficulties for devout Christians, whose theological beliefs are in some way universal and totally dissociated from political ideologies.

One of the reasons why persecution is side-tracked by academics in the West is the belief that religion is a spent force and that persecution is no more than an adage to its final exit. There is certainly mileage in this argument as religion is seldom these days considered in departments of sociology as a worthy subject for students to study. Grim and Finke, as American scholars, challenge such an exit thesis on the grounds that religion is not the spent force many Europeans think it is. Instead of focusing on an apparently secularised Europe, one should cast one's eyes world-wide. Attempts by certain countries, such as Russia and China, and one might include Cuba, to deliberately eliminate religion, have failed. In the many countries selected by Grim and Finke there is little evidence of a radical decline in religion, at least based on the simple criterion of a belief in God. Indeed, over the years, there are reports of a slight increase in such a belief. Only in Western Europe are there signs of a small decline. These assertions by Grim and Finke at least offer one pointer to the failure of European sociologists to turn their attention to persecution.

A core thesis of Grim and Finke is that the extent to which governments deny religious freedoms and violent religious persecution and conflict emerge. The argument is that when there is no declared religious freedom, the issue is not

one of neutrality but of conflict. It is the absence of persecution that implies the presence of religious freedom.

The second thesis is that where social forces (those not necessarily emanating from a government) would deny religious freedom, physical persecution increases. The more religions there are within a society, the less likelihood there is of persecution. Where one religion dominates, persecution becomes the order of the day.

Grim and Finke are to be congratulated as being the first sociologists to attempt to deal with global issues relating to contemporary persecution. There is much in this commendable book that cannot be reported here. The authors admit that it is only a beginning and further issues need to be considered. One wonders, however, whether their findings at this stage, lead only to conclusions that are rather obvious, at least to a European. Many of their observations, as they proceed with their major work, however, are of considerable importance in trying to grapple with this new social phenomenon. Large questions about persecution, however, still need to be addressed.

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RESSOURCEMENT: A MOVEMENT FOR RENEWAL IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY CATHOLIC THEOLOGY edited by Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, *Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, pp. xx + 583, £65, hbk*

For my students at the Catholic Chaplaincy in Newcastle (UK), Vatican II is as long ago as World War II was for me at their age. In other words, it is history. And at a time of crisis, it can be tempting for theologians to look at vibrant moments of the past rather than grappling with the present. But in so doing, we become curators of a museum.

It is precisely because *Ressourcement* does not fall into this trap that it is so valuable. Published for the 50th anniversary of Vatican II, it addresses renewal as something ongoing and indeed urgent. It takes the form of a collection of 32 articles, framed by short author biographies and an introduction, and an epilogue and very comprehensive bibliography. It might be said to be a *ressourcement* (return to the sources) of Vatican II itself. The passing of 50 years is in fact seen to give useful distance: mercifully free of 'liberal' or 'conservative' ideologies, the articles take some refreshing and often surprising perspectives. So Jansenism is examined as a possible early *Ressourcement* movement, and the reality of Modernism and its possible influence on *Nouvelle Théologie* are taken seriously. *Nouvelle théologie* (originally an accusation) is carefully distinguished from going *back* to sources. Teilhard de Chardin is reconsidered as a traditionalist in spite of himself, in that many of his themes can be found in Irenaeus and other Fathers; Benedict XVI is read as a second-generation *Ressourcement* theologian; and difficulties of coherence in de Lubac's theology of grace and Congar's later theology of ecumenism are teased out. The genesis of Vatican II's documents is valuably documented, and there are contributions too from the Orthodox and Protestant traditions. There is even an article (not so easy, it must be admitted, for non-psychologists) on Lacan's *ressourcement* of Freud, in which the former's significant connections with French Catholic thinkers and mutual influence are demonstrated.

As these examples suggest, the collection is characterised by its breadth of scholarship: indeed, as well as followers of de Lubac, Congar and Chenu, there are scholars more in the Cajetanian tradition of reading Aquinas ('Neo-Thomist' or 'Neo-Scholastic' are, for historical reasons, now pejorative descriptions, and so I avoid them). The editors, Gabriel Flynn from *Mater Dei* Institute at Dublin City University, and Paul Murray, founding director of the growing Centre of Catholic