

The church and religious persecution

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Calvin Shorts, Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin College Press, 2015, updated version 2018, 58 pp., ISBN 9781937555139, US\$9.99. Also available as an Ebook, US\$4.41.

This short book is in the series Calvin Shorts. These are books for the global church on specific issues. “Each book examines a single topic and suggests ways to think and act faithfully.” (“Calvin Shorts”, n.d.) This is a good description of this book. It is both theological and practical. The two authors are both political science professors at Christian universities. Both address religion and global politics in their research. Thus, they are well qualified to pen this helpful volume.

The book is divided into four chapters, leading the reader from introducing the topic, through a detailed examination of the scope of religious persecution globally, to the failure of the Church to respond and concluding with how the Church can and should respond. While the book is intended primarily for the North American church, it will be a helpful resource for the global church.

The introductory chapter defines the key concepts of religion, religious liberty and religious persecution. As we know, these are contested both in the academic community and among practitioners who report on the persecuted church. The authors argue strenuously for an inclusive understanding of religious freedom; that is, for pluralism. In other words, the authors urge Christians to promote religious freedom for adherents of all religious faiths. They contend that it is the “duty and calling of Christians to advocate for freedom of religion or belief as fundamental to recognizing both the image of God in humans and the sovereignty of God over them.” (p 8) The authors conclude this chapter by distinguishing persecution from social disapproval and note that religious liberty is not absolute but subject to reasonable limits.

The second chapter elucidates the scope of religious persecution worldwide. The authors identify that we have much more accurate information than just two decades ago because governments and non-governmental organizations, such as Pew, have begun publishing annual reports on the state of global religious freedom. Pew’s research, in particular, shows the growing hostility and persecution against Christians. In the Middle East, in particular, Christian populations that have thrived since the time of Christ are being decimated. As well, Islamic countries have become less tolerant of Christians in their midst.

The most difficult chapter for Christians and churches to read will be Chapter 3. It is titled “Their Blood Cries Out, But Are We Listening?” This is based on Paul Marshall’s book, *Their Blood Cries Out*, published in 1997. Marshall’s book similarly asked why churches tend not to speak out to encourage governments to act

to protect Christians who are being persecuted for their faith around the globe. Joustra and den Dulk identify theological issues that might prevent denominations from engagement on religious freedom. One of the main practical reasons is that it is hard to identify 'success' to show supporters that it is a cause worth pursuing.

The final chapter is both a plea for the North American church to engage on religious freedom and an action plan to carry this out. Getting churches to engage requires the development of a social movement to promote religious freedom as a matter of social justice. This involves reorienting the church. The most important practical way to do this is informed prayer. Most denominations are global so denominations can glean information from Christian brothers and sisters in other countries. As well, the authors highlight the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church as a source of information and a call to prayer.

Calvin University Press has additional resources for churches and Christians wishing to engage further on religious persecution posted on the website for the book. Hopefully, this can serve as an on-going resource for churches.

This short book can be a helpful resource for churches and Christians who want to learn the basics about religious persecution who also want to take action. It is from a Christian Reformed foundation but does not limit itself to that tradition's perspective. It is also primarily addressed to the North American church, although it will also be a useful resource for global Christians. For a short book, it is packed with information and suggestions for action.

References

- Calvin University Press, "Calvin Shorts". Available at: <https://calvin.edu/press/calvin-shorts/>
Calvin University Press, "The Church and Religious Persecution" website. Available at: <https://calvin.edu/directory/publications/the-church-and-religious-persecution>.
Marshall, Paul, *Their Blood Cries Out: The Worldwide Tragedy of Modern Christians Who Are Dying for Their Faith*, (Nashville: HarperCollins, 1997).

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Religion, liberty and the jurisdictional limits of law

Iain T. Benson and Barry W. Bussey (eds).

Toronto: LexisNexis Canada, 2017, 414 pp., ISBN 9780433495628, Softcover, CAN\$120.00.

This book compiles sixteen papers presented at a University of Toronto symposium. All references below are to authors whose works appear in this publication. Whilst