

offers a thorough account of the often heated debate over its implications, especially in regard to the salvific value of these religions and, in the case of Judaism, the perpetuity and adequacy of the earlier covenant(s). He also points out how thinking through the status of the Qur'an and of Muhammad as an individual – if only on the basis of their place in *natural* religion – has barely begun.

Overall this collection reflects a Church that is not afraid to face big questions, yet is also fractious and possibly inclined to too much talk.

AIDAN NICHOLS OP

THE PERSECUTION AND GENOCIDE OF CHRISTIANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST: PREVENTION, PROHIBITION, & PROSECUTION edited by Ronald J. Rychlak and Jane F. Adolphe, *Angelico Press*, Kettering, OH, 2017, pp. xii + 393, \$21.95, pbk

On 25 November 2014, Pope Francis addressed the European Parliament and drew attention to the severe persecution of Christians and other religious minorities around the world:

Here I cannot fail to recall the many instances of injustice and persecution which daily afflict religious minorities and Christians in particular, in various parts of the world. Communities and individuals today find themselves subjected to barbaric acts of violence: they are evicted from their homes and native lands, sold as slaves, killed, beheaded, crucified or burned alive, under the shameful and complicit silence of so many.

In the reporting of the speech in the mainstream media which followed, little was said about these particular comments, which sadly illustrates the point that was being made.

This era is probably the most violent for Christians in modern history. As has been patiently documented by the organizations who support them and advocate on their behalf, innumerable Christian communities are subject to rampant forms of intolerance, both religious and secular. The problem has got much worse since the turn of the millennium and Christians are more often under severe threat than any other faith group (see, for example, the data in Rupert Shortt, *Christianophobia: a faith under attack* (2013)). Therefore, one might expect this to have been for some time a major foreign policy concern for governments in many parts of the world. The fact that it has not been, helps reveal a persistent, powerful and rarely acknowledged hierarchy of victimhood.

As painfully detailed in this book, persecution of Christians and other minorities in the Middle East has risen to levels approaching religio-ethnic cleansing. Although it is hoped that the dismantling of the Islamic State will offer some respite and the possibility of return to Iraq

and Syria (something which is far from guaranteed), Christians continue to be killed or otherwise treated brutally and driven from their homes, in the lands which were some of the cradles of Christianity and where communities trace their histories back to the earliest church. Only recently have the sufferings, persecution and genocide of these Christians been admitted in certain quarters. That recognition has been the result of the tireless and courageous work of a handful of organizations and individuals, some of whom are contributors to this book.

In July 2015, it was again Pope Francis who was one of the first global leaders to use (and insist upon) the term ‘genocide’ with reference to the situation of persecuted Christians in areas of the Middle East. ‘Genocide’ is primarily a legal concept. It entails a denial of the right of existence of entire human groups. The legal concept is narrowly circumscribed and reserved for a particular subset of atrocities. For this reason, the legal concept has been criticized, because situations which cause dreadful suffering to many may nonetheless fall short of genocide and so not engage certain obligations under international law.

While many are aware of sporadic attacks against Christians in the Middle East, few properly appreciate that under ISIS a programme of total eradication was taking place. Nina Shea’s fine essay in this volume details the evidence that supports the view that – despite certain public statements to the contrary – ISIS in fact sought the complete elimination of Christians and other minorities from the lands of the caliphate. She describes what that programme meant for the people targeted. She also explains the obstacles that stood in the way of the eventual political designation by the United States, on 17 March 2016, of an ongoing genocide (for only the second time in the country’s history). Theoretically at least, this designation should have an ongoing positive effect of raising international awareness of what has been happening and compel other states to act.

This book is the fruit of an international expert meeting, organized under the auspices of the International Centre on Law, Life, Faith and Family. The participants included academics, politicians, lawyers, theologians, journalists and humanitarian relief workers, some of whom are leaders in their fields. The resulting collection of essays is not in any sense narrowly legal or technical. The majority of the essays are accessible to a general reader, although some background understanding of international law would be helpful for an understanding of a couple of the papers. The book offers a detailed, informed and often moving accounts of the situation of this religious minority in the region. Further essays provide depth of perspective by exploring relevant topics, such as the history of Christian persecution, the politics of genocide declarations, the theological meaning of religious freedom, sharia provisions affecting Christians (and, in particular, Christian women), and the international mechanisms by which those guilty of crimes may be brought to account. (The title is a little misleading in that the focus is in fact

almost entirely on Iraq and Syria, and is not as exclusively legal as the subtitle may suggest.)

One obvious reason why the extent of the persecution of Christians in the Muslim world has not been revealed is that parts of the media and others have made the error of equating the criticism of some Muslims and certain interpretations of Islam with racism. This attitude has been cemented by the amazingly prevalent view that Christianity is somehow a 'Western religion'. The current authors show courage in attempting to grapple with some of the thorny problems that arise in this context. How exactly do you characterize the nature of the threat that certain Islamic theologies pose? (The question is crucial if some kind of strategy is going to be developed to counter that specific threat.) What is the historical nature of Christian and Muslim co-existence, and what can be learned and applied from that? (A recurrent and chilling theme is the misconceptions that Westerners sometimes entertain about the realities of the special status Jews and Christians notionally enjoy as 'People of the Book'.) The answers provided to some of these questions are necessarily introductory, but there is a commendable refusal to shirk the issues.

ALISTAIR JONES OP

THE INDISSOLUBILITY OF MARRIAGE AND THE COUNCIL OF TRENT by E. Christian Brugger, *Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 2017, pp. xiii + 295, \$69.95, hbk*

Professor Brugger engagingly begins this book by describing how research into what initially seemed a quiet backwater of historical theology became important for one of the hottest topics in contemporary theological discussion. Underlying a considerable number of approaches to the theology of marriage today are a number of suggestions, resting largely on the scholarship of Piet Fransen, that Trent did not really teach that marriage was indissoluble – and drawing from this the conclusion that the Church today has the theological space to revise its present teaching on this subject. In the light of these suggestions Brugger asks what Trent really did teach.

Before looking at what conclusions he reaches on this, it is worth noting how he gets there. The book offers an exemplary treatment of the historical path by which Trent arrived at its teaching on the marriage bond. Brugger looks at the various challenges that were being posed to Church teaching and practice on marriage, both from the Reformers and from the Orthodox (the 'Greeks', in the terminology of the time), and then traces the evolution of Trent's teaching from the first sessions