Introduction

Christianity and Freedom in the Contemporary World

Allen D. Hertzke

The seizure of Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, by Islamic State militants in the summer of 2014 stunned the world. Especially shocking was their brutal efficiency in killing or expelling the entire, and ancient, Christian population from the city. But for those following developments in the region over the past decade this was, sad to say, less of a shock. Since the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, Western advocates such as Nina Shea and local leaders including Chaldean Patriarch Louis Raphaël I Sako of Baghdad have sounded the alarm about the catastrophic assault on Christian minorities, which accelerated with the civil war in Syria and the rise of ISIS. But what has also become evident is that the fate of other vulnerable religious minorities, not to mention the pluralist fabric of these societies, rides on the fate of Christians. Thus the scenario playing out in the Middle East underscores the importance of assessing the role and fate of Christian communities around the globe.

As the historical volume demonstrates, Christianity, with all of its human frailties, nonetheless carries in its DNA a transcendent conception of human dignity and equality conducive to free institutions and societies. Because the experiences of Christian minorities today mirror those that spawned earlier churches' historic innovations, the contemporary situation offers an unprecedented opportunity – a kind of vast global laboratory – to probe how diverse Christian communities are replicating the historical findings of *Volume 1* of this project.

But how do Christian communities under various forms of pressure or hardship instantiate the faith's transcendent vision? In what ways, or where, are they advancing freedom, building civil society, or providing economic uplift in diverse societies around the world? What are the causes and dimensions of the persecution they face and how are they responding to that pressure? What resources – theological, social, or transnational – do they marshal in leavening their societies? And what will be lost if the Christian presence is marginalized or, in the case of parts of the Middle East, vanishes?

These questions are of enormous relevance to understanding contemporary religious persecution and to devising adequate policy responses to it. To answer them the Christianity and Freedom Project commissioned original field research guided by common questions, along with global demographic overviews, thematic investigations, and surveys by leading scholars, to understand how Christian minorities and transnational institutions contribute to societies across the globe. The result is an unprecedented portrait of the contemporary role and response of Christian communities under diverse conditions of struggle, hardship, and oppression.

We begin with the context. Christianity faces a global crisis of persecution, as believers in many places around the world suffer harassment, marginalization, and violence – in more countries and under more diverse settings than any other faith group. A number of recent studies document the contours of this trend. For example, Rupert Shortt, religion editor of the *London Times Literary Supplement*, investigated the shocking treatment of Christians on several continents, often with official collusion, and exposes the indifferent western response. In his 2012 book, *Christianophobia: A Faith under Attack*, he argues that this story is underreported because Christian believers do not become radicalized and tend to resist nonviolently, enabling politicians and the media to play down the problem.[1]

John Allen, senior correspondent for the *National Catholic Reporter*, contends that the persecution of Christians is the most dramatic religion story in the early twenty-first century, yet one that many in the West have little idea is even happening. In his 2013 book, *The Global War on Christians: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Anti-Christian Persecution*, he laments that the new martyrs often suffer in silence.[2] Most recently, a contributor to the present volume, Paul Marshall, along with coauthors Lela Gilbert and Nina Shea, document the scope and trends of this crisis in *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians* (2013). Because this work so nicely catalogs the diverse origins and settings of persecution, we commissioned Marshall to team up with the demographer Todd M. Johnson to map the terrain of anti-Christian persecution and its diverse motivations. One of the key findings of that exploration, as Marshall documents in this volume, is that the very association of Christianity with freedom sparks repression by totalitarians, autocrats, and theocratic regimes threatened by Christians' independence, transcendent allegiances, and cultivation of civil society.[3]

Despite the mounting evidence of this crisis, skeptics remain in the academy and commentariate. Candida Moss, who claims that ancient Christians invented the story of martyrdom to propagandize the faith, sees the same phenomenon in stories of anti-Christian persecution today.[4] This seems like willful ignorance. In a span of less than a year we have witnessed the rapid liquidation of Christianity in the Nineveh Plain, the methodical demolition of church buildings in eastern China,

massive atrocities against Christians by Boko Haram in Nigeria, the bombing of Christian churches in Pakistan, the heartrending beheadings of Coptic Christians in Libya, and the slaughter of Christian students in Kenya.[5]

Systematic documentation, moreover, demonstrates the widespread nature of assaults on Christian communities. The nonpartisan Pew Research Center's meticulous studies reveal global patterns of harassment of specific religious peoples by governments and dominant social groups – including killings, physical assaults, arrests, desecration of holy sites, mob violence, intimidation, and discrimination in employment, education, and housing. During the six years covered (2007–2013) Christians suffered harassment at some point in a total of 151 countries, more than that of any other religious group.[6] Muslims, the next group facing harassment (in a total of 136 countries over the period), suffer both in non-Muslim societies and Muslim-majority countries – the latter often for being the wrong kind of Muslims. Christians, on the other hand, suffer in more diverse settings and across a wider geographic span.

Beyond the humanitarian and human rights dimensions of this crisis, why does this matter? As the contributors to this volume show, it matters because Christianity plays a distinct and often outsized role in promoting ideas and practices of freedom globally and in their particular communities. Votaries of liberty, whether religious or not, thus have a stake in the fate of this global religious community.

To be clear, we do not suggest that Christian churches always or everywhere promote human freedom in the world today. As in history, contemporary Christian communities can be deeply compromised by political interests, swept up in ethnic violence, or complicit in exploitation. The failure, even complicity, of churches during the Rwanda genocide reminds us of this. More recently, Christian militias and mobs have engaged in widespread violence against Muslims in the Central African Republic. But both of these cases sparked soul searching by Christian leaders and subsequent initiatives of peacemaking and reconciliation.[7] Christianity's DNA, combined with its robust global humanitarian networks, serves as a potential – if not inevitable – corrective of universal human failures.

With this context in mind, we now turn to a review of the contributions in this volume, beginning with several chapters that survey the global scene. Todd M. Johnson, the world's most eminent scholar of religious demography, launches this assessment with a new and comprehensive analysis of the demographics of persecution. He concludes that more than one of every five Christians in the world live in states where they are likely to face persecution. This amounts to some 500 million Christians. By 2020, Johnson predicts, this figure will rise to 600 million, or nearly a quarter (23.5 percent) of the world's Christian population. Indeed, persecution against Christians persists in more nations and affects more people than it does any other religious community. Some of the fastest-growing

traditions in global Christianity – such as Pentecostal and independent churches – find themselves under increasing risk of persecution.

Working with patterns identified by Dr. Johnson, Paul Marshall presents a taxonomy of the sources of anti-Christian persecution. In his chapter, "Patterns and Purposes of Contemporary Anti-Christian Persecution," Marshall finds that persecution against Christians is massive, widespread, increasing, and underreported. In probing the patterns of this persecution, he finds four principal sources: 1) the Communist remnant (China, Vietnam, Laos, North Korea, and Cuba); 2) South Asian religious nationalism (India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan); 3) the Muslim-majority world; and 4) authoritarian and national security states. Marshall also examines a fifth threat to Christian freedom: Western secularism. While milder than the other categories, restrictions and hostilities in a number of countries in the West are growing and cause for alarm, particularly because they undercut the ability of the West to uphold international norms and law on religious freedom. Marshall offers a penetrating theological explanation that unites the disparate sources of persecution. Because Christianity denies that the state is the ultimate arbiter of human life, it challenges all attempts – whether Communist, theocratic, ethnic nationalist, or authoritarian – to impose a single authority in state and society. Thus a key driver in the contemporary persecution of Christians is the very association of Christianity with freedom and pluralism – a finding with profound policy implications.

Donald E. Miller next synthesizes the cutting-edge findings of a massive study he directed of global Pentecostalism. His chapter demonstrates the energy, vitality, and entrepreneurial resourcefulness of Pentecostal and charismatic congregations. With one-quarter of the world's Christians, this movement represents a pivotal renewal force within global Christianity, fueled by religious zeal, bold vision, adaptability to local context, rapid indigenization, and nonhierarchical organization. Miller documents the widely varied initiatives of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians in numerous communities of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. These initiatives include the provision of food and clothing for the impoverished, youth programs, high-quality schools in slums, medical clinics, blood banks, alcohol and drug rehabilitation, and mental health programs. Miller finds that those who embrace the conservative moral ethic of Pentecostalism experience upward mobility and the sense of agency that flows from it. While often facing discrimination or persecution, Pentecostals are learning how to work creatively with government officials in pressing for their right to religious freedom and in that way opening spaces for others in civil society.

Miller's chapter also underscores a crucial finding about conditions for Christianity in Latin America. As he demonstrates, the explosive growth of Pentecostalism there initially sparked animosity with the Catholic majority. But as Pentecostal communities planted deep roots in many Latin American countries, healthy competition and dialogue ensued. Indeed, as Anthony Gill has documented,

Pentecostal competition invigorated Catholicism in the continent and spurred broad protections of religious liberty and resulting norms of interreligious amity.[8]

Rebecca S. Shah's chapter, "Empowering Poor Women," elaborates on Miller's findings about the Christian contribution to personal agency and upward mobility. Based on more than a thousand new interviews on three continents, Shah's fine-grained analysis documents the empowering role Christian faith can play in the lives of poor women in developing countries. With a special focus on female converts to Christianity from "untouchable" backgrounds in India, Shah finds that the new faith of these women often enhances their dignity, agency, and hope for the future. She also finds that participation in small, face-to-face Christian communities gives them access to networks of support and accountability that yield significant economic and social benefits. For example, Shah demonstrates that women who participate in these faith-based networks are more successful in microfinance projects; more able to save money for the needs of their families, including their children's education; and more likely to report cases of domestic abuse and enlist community leaders to combat it.

Rounding out our global overviews, Mark Brockway and Allen D. Hertzke explore what they term global Christian networks for human dignity. The Christian idea of the surpassing worth of all persons made in the image of God – which drove Christian contributions to freedom in antiquity – can serve as a powerful challenge for Christians to address affronts to human dignity in the contemporary world. As Brockway and Hertzke show, the globalization of Christianity marries this idea of dignity with the growing capacities of transnational Christian networks. Their chapter illustrates how Christian dignity is instantiated in overlapping networks focused on global poverty, AIDS, human trafficking, religious persecution, displacement, and war. These Christian networks play an invaluable if unheralded role on the global stage in human rights advocacy, humanitarian succor, and peacemaking.

We now turn our attention to field research findings on the role and status of Christian minorities in different nations around the globe. Fenggang Yang launches this exploration with his stunning chapter "The Growth and Dynamism of Chinese Christianity." Drawing on the unprecedented access of a large team of field research scholars in China, Yang documents the accelerating growth of Christianity in the face of state repression. Today at least 5 percent of China's vast populace is Christian, and, with compounding growth rates, that percentage will rise exponentially. Remarkably, Yang predicts that by 2030, China may well pass the United States as having the world's largest Christian population. As Yang demonstrates, Christianity's growth has moved from rural to urban areas, from the marginalized to middle-class professionals, and toward greater diversification and indigenization.

Yang finds close parallels between Christianity in China today and its position in the Roman Empire on the eve of the Edict of Milan, nicely capturing the value

of examining the faith across time and place. Just as Christianity spread through the networks of the Roman Empire, today's Christians capitalize on China's robust infrastructure for travel, communication, and global commerce to share and entrench the faith. Similarly, Christianity provides appealing sources of morality and meaning that propel its growth, just as it did in ancient Rome. Finally, compounding growth rates in China today parallel those that took Christianity from 5–10 percent of the Roman Empire in 300 A.D. to 50 percent by 350, leading Yang to see a similar trajectory as possible in China.

What makes this dynamic growth fateful is Christianity's outsized role in promoting human rights, religious freedom, civil society, and social welfare. Indeed, Yang demonstrates how Christians are at the front lines of practicing and promoting individual freedoms, rule of law, civic engagement, and charitable enterprise. Buoying this engagement have been the rise of Christian entrepreneurs and business networks; the conversion of exiled leaders of the 1989 democracy movement and the ongoing conversion of Chinese students; and the prominence of Christian lawyers in the defense of human rights. Moreover, Yang's own initiatives suggest a growing boldness of these advocates. As recounted in the chapter, Yang convened a group of prominent Chinese Christian lawyers, pastors, and academics at Purdue University in May 2014. Those advocates signed a strong declaration, "The Purdue Consensus on Religious Freedom," that called upon the regime to live up to international standards on religious liberty.

From China we turn to Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority nation. Robert W. Hefner and Zainal Abidin Bagir assembled an international team of Muslim and Christian scholars to assess Christianity and religious freedom in Indonesia. Bagir and Hefner find that Christians are making constructive political contributions despite rising threats to their freedom and security. Christians constitute nearly 10 percent of Indonesia's population, and they have made crucial contributions to its culture, education, and independence struggle. However, major Christian leaders interviewed in 2013 argue that conditions for Christians have deteriorated since Suharto's fall fifteen years ago. Christians report more frequent attacks on churches and schools as well as efforts to marginalize them socially and politically. In this challenging climate, Christians continue to participate in Indonesia's formal framework of cooperation between the government and religious institutions, but they are also pressing authorities to do more to guarantee their freedom and security.

Another international team, Chad M. Bauman in the United States and James Ponniah in India, chart the growth and challenges for Christianity in India. In a groundbreaking study based on extensive new field research, Bauman and Ponniah provide an up-to-date account of the status and role of Christianity in the world's largest democracy, Hindu-majority India. Constituting only about 4 percent of the

population, the Christian community has made substantial and disproportionate contributions to Indian civil society, especially in education, health care, poverty amelioration, and human rights activism. However, Bauman and Ponniah show that Christianity's appeal to low-caste and tribal peoples has provoked fear among the guardians of traditional Indian society, resulting in attempts – sometimes violent – to limit the freedom of Christians. And yet the Christian community's growing experience of harassment and violence has not led it to withdraw from civil society. On the contrary, Bauman and Ponniah conclude that Christians have increased their investment in the people of India. They are forming partnerships not only with other minority communities experiencing oppression, including Muslims, but also with secular-minded Hindus and human rights activists.

Next, Reg Reimer draws upon a rich network of local contacts to explore the contributions of Christians to freedom amid adversity in Vietnam. Though marginalized and perennially suspect in the Communist state, Christians represent growing and productive communities deeply embedded in the national cultures of Vietnam. Reimer shows that Christianity contributed to Vietnam's modernization, including the universally used writing script that enabled high literacy rates. While composing 10 percent of the population, Christians play an outsized role in education, health, aid to the poor and vulnerable, and upholding of human rights. With particular appeal to stigmatized ethnic minorities, the Christian "good news" that every person is created in God's image acts as a liberating force for oppressed peoples. Christian conversion also provides a documented economic uplift by promoting education, agency, industry, and thrift. Reimer finds that social hostility against Christians is often tolerated or instigated by local governmental authorities, but that Christians are increasingly protesting that treatment, standing up for human rights, and acting as a liberalizing force in society. Christian communities, particularly Protestants, also model democracy with free and regular elections for pastors, elders, and denominational church officials.

Blending deep personal experience and months of targeted field investigation, Sara Singha explores the challenge and leaven of Christian communities in Pakistan. Singha begins by recounting how Christians played a vital role in the formation of Pakistan by pivotally backing the effort of Pakistan's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, to establish the country as a pluralistic democracy. Today Christians run orphanages, hospitals, clinics, women's centers, and social work agencies across the nation. Their educational system is the most highly rated in the country, attracting the children of many elite Muslim families. Unfortunately, over time Pakistan's governments have embraced exclusionary policies that undermine Jinnah's vision and threaten the ability of Christians to contribute constructively to Pakistani society. Apostasy and blasphemy laws have created a chilling environment for Christians, in which the mere accusation can unleash vigilante attacks against vulnerable

religious minorities. Since these tools of intimidation are also employed against Ahmadis, Muslim reformers, and women's rights advocates, we see again how the fate of Christians is twinned with the maintenance and expansion of freedom. While Christians are increasingly fearful – for good reason in light of church bombings, mob violence, and state harassment – Singha shows that they are also increasingly active and assertive players in public life.

Turning to a crucial fault line of ethnoreligious clashes, Richard Burgess and Danny McCain chart the challenge to Christianity of religious violence in Nigeria. Burgess and McCain focus primarily on the role of Christian communities in central and northern Nigeria in the face of violence and discrimination. In the core northern states where Shari'a law is enforced, Christians face severe restrictions on religious practice and vigilante violence. In the border region, they confront widespread destruction of church property and extensive killings at the hands of the brutal Boko Haram insurgency, which in 2015 proclaimed its allegiance to the Islamic State in the Middle East. While these attacks have led some Christian youth to lash out in reprisals against Muslims, Christian leaders have undertaken creative initiatives of conflict prevention, interfaith dialogue, and peacemaking. In addition, churches remain extensively involved in ministries of assistance to widows and orphans, health care, development projects, skills training, and microenterprises. Repression and violence have generally sparked increasing political engagement by Christians, though in some contexts insecurity has led to evacuation and a diminished Christian presence. While Boko Haram atrocities have received international attention, Burgess and McCain delve beneath the headlines to recount the often-courageous Christian responses, which deserve wider recognition and support.

We round this contemporary volume with several chapters on the role of Christians increasingly under siege in the Middle East. We begin with the timely chapter by Mariz Tadros, "Copts of Egypt: Defiance, Compliance, and Continuity." On the basis of extensive participant observation, along with dozens of interviews with Christians and Muslims who have been directly involved in Egypt's dramatic political upheavals over the past three years, Mariz Tadros provides a firsthand account of Coptic contributions to civil and religious freedom in the largest and most influential Arab country. For more than one thousand years, the Copts have contributed to Egypt's political thought, enriched its culture, and strengthened its economy. Copts played a pioneering role in developing indigenous secular thinking and participated en masse in emancipatory revolutions from 1919 to the present day. However, between January 2011, with the onset of the revolutionary protests against Mubarak, and today, in the aftermath of the ouster of President Morsi, Egypt has witnessed the worst anti-Coptic backlash in modern history. At the same time, it has also experienced some of the highest levels of interreligious

solidarity. Tadros marshals original qualitative and quantitative research to clarify the rising challenges Copts have faced, as well as how they are likely to shape Egypt's future.

Next we feature two chapters on the distinct challenges of Christians in the Holy Land. In the first chapter, Duane Alexander Miller and Philip Sumpter show that Palestinian Christians live a precarious existence, caught between the constrictions of Israeli policies (and a poor economy) in the West Bank and rising Islamist social pressures within Palestinian society. Emigration is a crucial problem, as adaptable young people seek better economic opportunities abroad. Christian leaders and churches have responded to this challenge of sustaining the next generation by providing housing for young families and promoting economic development, often drawing upon transnational denominational support. Another strategy of survival has been the operation of high-quality Christian schools that appeal to Muslim youth, offering the opportunity to inculcate notions of tolerance and charity and thus leaven Palestinian society as a counterweight to militancy. Field research in the West Bank uncovered how believers navigate the fierce challenges of their dual identity as Christians and Palestinians through a two-level discourse that affirms Palestinian solidarity on the public level but in private insists that growing Islamist antagonism threatens their presence and freedom.

In the next chapter the Israeli scholar Daphne Tsimhoni examines Christians in the state of Israel. Tsimhoni begins with a comprehensive portrait of the demographic presence, status, and role of Christian communities in Israel and East Jerusalem. She charts the distinct characteristics of the different centers of Christians in Israel, the state discrimination and social pressure they face, and tensions between integration and emigration. While representing a small minority, Christians have played a prominent role as spokespersons of the Arab minority in the Knesset and providers of educational and welfare services. The chapter explores how they might help promote peace and understanding between Jews and Palestinian Arabs.

Though political turmoil in the Middle East threatens ancient Christian communities, Amaney Jamal and Michael Hoffman provide a glimmer of hope in their chapter on Arab Muslim attitudes toward religious minorities. Using new and unique data from the second wave of the Arab Barometer survey, Jamal and Hoffman examine perceptions toward religious minorities in ten Arab countries. They find that in this region – often a hotbed of politically driven religious conflict – tolerance of religious minorities is actually quite high. While considerable differences exist both within and across countries, citizens of the Arab world are, for the most part, highly supportive of political and religious rights for non-Muslims, including Christians, and believe that religious minorities should be welcome in Muslim states. Majorities of Muslims in every country included

in this survey support equal political rights for non-Muslims, would be willing to have a non-Muslim as a neighbor, and believe that religious differences are not a reason to doubt a fellow citizen's patriotism. These hopeful findings cast doubt on common claims that religion – and particularly, Islam – is an intractable source of intolerance in the Middle East.

Finally, we are pleased to have the tremendously timely contribution by Matthew Barber on the crisis facing Christians in Iraq and Syria. Barber, who has lived and conducted extensive field research in the region over the past several years, was studying in Syria when the civil war erupted and, momentously, was in northern Iraq in the summer of 2014 when Islamic State militants expelled Christians from Mosul and assaulted Yazidis in the Sinjar Mountains. He was one of the first outside observers to interview Christian families and Yazidi refugees fleeing from the ISIS reign of terror.

Barber begins by providing a lens into the historical roots of the various Chaldean and Assyrian Christian communities in the region, and how they faced successive shocks in the twentieth century – the Ottoman collapse, colonial exploitation, and the emergence of Baathist regimes. This historical context helps the reader understand the precarious position of these communities, which left them uniquely vulnerable when social order collapsed in the wake of the Iraq war and the Syrian conflict. Barber's historically informed ethnography illuminates the on-the-ground experience of Christians in the face of chaos, brutal atrocities, and religious cleansing. Portentously, he finds that, in the absence of outside intervention, self-defense may be the best hope for remnants of these ancient communities. Indeed, Christians have begun forming self-defense militias, an entirely understandable response to the existential peril they face. Let us hope that more vigorous international responses will provide alternatives to this bleak scenario.

SUMMARY THEMES

Three broad themes emerge from this volume's rich scholarship. First, in assaying global Christianity we are struck by the tremendous diversity of its contexts, challenges, and responses. Nested amid Dalit women in India, business networks of Southeast Asia, teeming Chinese cities, African villages, Latin American favelas, or refugee camps in Turkey, it spans the globe and adapts to diverse cultural and political environments. It faces a parlous existence in the Middle East but dynamic growth in China and Africa. Confronting varying forms of pressure, Christians respond in multifold ways. They form coalitions to protect their rights; they engage in interfaith initiatives of peacemaking; they cultivate civil society and pledge their loyalty as citizens. Sad to say, Christians sometimes lash out in reprisals, as in the Central African Republic; sometimes their heroic