

Book Review: The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century

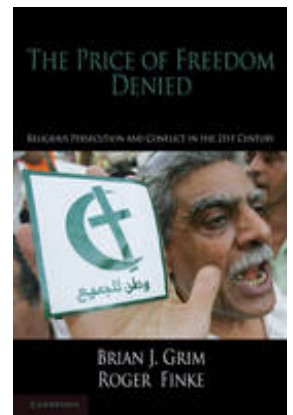
Rachel Dearlove discovers an invaluable evidence-based book on the role of religion in modern conflict, essential reading for students and for policy makers

The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century. Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke. [Cambridge University Press](#). March 2011.

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The Price of Freedom Denied is the latest publication in the Cambridge Studies in Social Theory, Religion and Politics series, which seeks to apply social theory to religious and political phenomena, harking back to the focus of the fathers of sociology – Durkheim, Weber and Comte – who saw religion as the key to unlocking some of the most fundamental components of societal life. This work focuses on the enduring phenomena of religious persecution and its relationship with the society and state in which it occurs, a topic of high relevance today.

The authors, Brian J. Grim, Director of Cross-National Data for the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life, and Roger Finke, Professor of Sociology and Religious Studies, Pennsylvania State University and the Director of the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA), have a history of using hard data to gain insight into the religious life of nations and this work continues that pattern. *The Price of Freedom Denied* provides a data driven but accessible counter argument to Samuel P. Huntington's 'clash of civilisations' theory that places cultural and religious identities as the prime motivator for conflict in the post-cold war period. Grim and Finke argue that it is not *religious identity* itself that is the force behind much religious conflict, but legal and social restriction of *religious freedom*. They argue that it is in the most pluralistic and religiously liberal societies that levels of persecution are at their lowest, not in the cultural monopolies of Huntington's theory.



The data on which their argument rests are drawn from the [US State Department's International Religious Freedoms](#) reports which cover nearly 200 countries. Grim and Finke focus on the 143 countries with populations of 2 million or more and use the existing ARDA codebook to allow for comparisons across countries. The overarching analysis identifies six groups of countries along the two axes of social restriction and government restriction, with increasing levels of violent religious persecution found moving up the graph, with the extreme position occupied by countries with the highest levels of social and government restriction.

The names given to the six groups don't quite roll off the tongue, but are worth noting here: High levels of religious freedoms (Japan, Denmark, New Zealand); Freedoms with some tensions (Brazil, Philippines, United Kingdom); Power is partitioned between religion and state (Ethiopia, Germany, Nigeria, Mexico); Monopolistic Social Pressures (India, Indonesia, Russia, Turkey); Religion as a political threat (China, Vietnam); and Socio-political monopolies (Bangladesh, Egypt, Pakistan, Iran). This classification makes for some challenging reading as one looks for 'advanced' western civilisations and finds them in slightly uncomfortable company. The analysis is expanded through a series of six cases studies, one for each category of country identified – Japan, Brazil, Nigeria, China, India and Iran – placing the data gathered in its wider historical narrative.

Throughout this work Grim and Finke deal with the most politically and culturally sensitive areas of study with delicacy but also with a directness that is refreshing, most notably in their in-depth exploration of the high rates of religious persecution present in many Muslim-majority societies. By identifying the elephant in the corner that is so often unacknowledged in discussions of conflict – the very nature of Islam itself – the authors provide insight into one of the most politically delicate areas of social scientific study.

Bringing together a decade's worth of research *The Price of Freedom Denied* is a challenge to those who seek to down play the role of religion in modern conflict and violence but also an invaluable evidence base for policy makers in all countries seeking ways to reduce persecution.

Rachel Dearlove is a university manager at the University of Reading, with a special interest in international education.

