

## Foreword

The early Christian experience of persecution has attracted a long history of scholarship. It was the subject of both ardent devotion and significant dispute since antiquity. This occurred not only vis-à-vis hostile outsiders, but also between Christians sharply divided over whether one should seek martyrdom or flee persecution, and how to restore those whose confession crumbled under duress.

Ironically, most modern critical study of the subject (since, say, Edward Gibbon, 1737–1794) has been carried out by scholars of the North Atlantic world who were themselves untroubled by any recent or personal experience of religious persecution, and whose political cultures had for the most part erected legal protections that seemed at least for the time being to render the colourful and exaggerated ancient testimonies wholly implausible. Until very recently, there have been scholars keen to cultivate publicity around assertions that Christian claims of persecution, then or now, are wholesale ‘myth’, ‘invented’ for purposes of political convenience.

Across many parts of Asia, however, the oppression of Christians is shockingly real today, as indeed it was repeatedly in antiquity and in later centuries: the BBC in 2019 reported ‘near genocide’ levels of violence, abuse and harassment against believers.

For these and many other good reasons, it is a privilege to welcome this volume by Chee-Chiew Lee, one of Southeast Asia’s leading female biblical scholars and an associate professor of New Testament in the Chinese programme of Singapore Bible College. She offers here a constructive engagement with existing scholarship to explore the diverse causes of, and responses to, persecution in the New Testament, showing how its authors offer an empathetic theology of perseverance that has the potential to empower a response contextually suited for afflicted Christians in Asian and African settings today.

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