

**Non-Muslims in Muslim majority societies: with focus on the Middle East and Pakistan**, edited by Kajsa Ahlstrand and Göran Gunner, Cambridge, UK, Lutterworth Press, 2011, x + 177 pp., £18.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-7188-9244-9

This collection of 11 chapters reflects the output of a Christian–Muslim symposium held in Sweden. It is a valiant attempt by academic and other experts from Europe, Pakistan and the Middle East to address real issues. However, whilst some good material is presented, there is much that disappoints. The two most critically engaging chapters are those by the editors, Kajsa Ahlstrand of Mission Studies at Uppsala University, and Göran Gunner, a researcher for the Church of Sweden and an associate professor at the University of Uppsala.

Gunner's chapter, 'The use of the concept minority: a protection or a burden in relation to international law', argues convincingly that more must be done to ensure the survival of Christian minorities and their religious practices in Muslim lands. This 'must include both the *forum internum*, the right to hold an inner belief or you may say a conviction by heart, and the *forum externum*, the right to manifest the belief in public as well as privately' (p. 32). The argument is well made.

Ahlstrand provides the concluding chapter on 'Possible strategies for religious communities under threat'. She explores martyrdom, conflict resolution, non-violent resistance and self-defence. She asks, somewhat rhetorically, if it might even be acceptable for Christians to fight against aggressive persecution. Ahlstrand concludes that Christians living in comparatively safe societies with freedom of religion and other legal comforts should express more informed and practical support for Christians living elsewhere, where such niceties of life are either absent or under threat.

Unfortunately the remaining contributors struggle either to match the academic standard of the editors' chapters or to demonstrate any particularly novel ideas. The fundamental conundrum would seem to be an absence of any real purposeful or coherent theme, despite the optimistic title of the book, that would successfully link the articles together in any sustained and meaningful way. Nonetheless, the book starts well. Professor Mustafa Abu Sway of Al-Quds University provides a fairly good summary of the traditional theological position of Christians and Christianity in the opening chapter, 'The status of Christians in the Islamic worldview'. Thereafter, regrettably, the material is a little patchy. The remaining chapters range over such topics as 'The problem of jurisdiction in the contemporary nation-state', 'Non-Muslims in Middle Eastern Muslim societies', 'Faith based organizations and the configuration of civil society in the MENA-perspective', the 'Status of non-Muslims in a Palestinian state', 'Managing Christian–Muslim relations in Pakistani setting', 'Non-Muslim women in Pakistan: minority within minority', 'Islamization of laws in Pakistan and its effects on minorities' and 'Non-Muslims in an Islamic state: a case study of Pakistan'.

One suspects a degree of translation difficulty at play, for some of the chapters read awkwardly and there are occasional spelling and transliteration errors – *Qanun-e-Shalladat* for *Qanun-e-Shahadat* for example (p. 126). There are also some lengthy and unnecessary repetitions across several chapters with respect to quotations of large sections of the Pakistani constitution. More concise editing may have been helpful. Interestingly, the ghastly *Hudood* Ordinances of the late General Zia al Haq come in for a lot of criticism from all the Pakistani contributors, who are at pains to point out that these confused laws discriminate against Muslim minority groups as well as against Christians. Discussing the disturbingly immense gulf between ideals and reality inside an Islamic state, Ahmad Salim, a Senior Research Associate at the Sustainable Development Policy Institute, grimly observes:

'Regimes changed and decades have passed but these goals remain an elusive dream because the rulers failed to live up to their claims of equality' (p. 136).

In the final analysis, *Non-Muslims in Muslim majority societies* disappoints as much as it enchants. This ambitious book aims to cover a fairly wide range of subjects pertinent to non-Muslim minorities in Muslim societies, which will undoubtedly be of some interest to academics and students in the field of Christian–Muslim relations. Despite its limitations, it is certainly an extremely well-intentioned contribution to the field and may yet lead on to better research and material in the future. One can only hope so.