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- 1 This is a difficult book to review for a sociological journal in that it is not really a sociological text at all. It is true that in some chapters at least, the book draws on sociological material; it also poses questions that sociologists should themselves be taking very seriously. But the text itself endorses explicitly Christian rather than sociological answers; its aim is to re-vitalize the Christian presence in modern Western society. The authors come from different professional backgrounds (L.N. is a distinguished church leader, L.S. is a Professor of Mission at Yale University and J.T. is a doctoral student with a particular interest in Islam); all, however, are writing from a Christian point of view.
- 2 What, then, is the problem that they are seeking to resolve? They are concerned with the nature of modern European (and for most part British) society at the turn of the millennium. Under the guise of multi-culturalism (analysed in some detail), this has, they claim, become a society lacking in moral consensus except in the most superficial sense; it is rapidly losing both direction and coherence. It is moreover, the claims of the Muslim minority which reveal the extent of the religious and moral vacuum. It is Muslims rather than Christians who react – sometimes vociferously – to the secular

nature of society, not least to the dishonouring of the name of Christ in both popular parlance and the public media and it is Muslims who point out the abdication by Christians of the centrality of their role. In other words, the arrival of significant numbers of Muslims in the post-war period acts as a catalyst: the Muslim presence makes explicit the underlying malaise of modern European society and the failure of the Christian contribution as a possible counterweight.

- 3 Given the perspective from which the book is written, it is hardly surprising that the answer comes in the form of renewing the Christian presence in the public square as well as in private life. The de-privatization of religion becomes an important theme quite apart from the re-christianization of values. For the liberal state to function in a truly democratic fashion, it should be balanced by an awareness of supra-natural realities. Without the latter, secular humanism is in danger of becoming itself a form of secular hegemony, as likely as any other hegemony to drift towards intolerance, even to totalitarianism.
- 4 Each author tackles the question in a different way. Bishop L.B., unsurprisingly, makes the most explicit demands on the Christian community to fulfil its obligations to society. L.S. dwells more on the nature of Islam and the challenge that this presents to a secular society. The argument draws on Western political philosophy with particular reference to the nature of the modern state. J.T.'s chapters are more pragmatic, resting on the analysis of recent events and documents and drawing on her own work on the newly-formed Inner Cities Religious Council in Britain. The I.C.R.C. has been obliged to come to terms with "religion" in public discourse, in that it is driven by the demands of the religious minorities. One very specific demand concerns the Muslim request that their needs and identities should be constructed in terms of religion – not in terms of race or nationality (the preferred categories of a secular society). L.S. emphasizes the same point.
- 5 From a sociological point of view, one issue stands out. How can a modern Western democracy, with all the implications of this term with respect to post-Enlightenment political understandings, accommodate minorities whose very existence endorses a completely different way of thinking? Or, following L.S., how can a secular society (a tradition which itself derives from Christian thinking) deal with a minority which repudiates "the lightness of separating the things of Caesar from the things of God" (p. 48)? Sociologists of religion may not be entirely happy with either the analysis or the answers offered in this book; they would, however, be well-advised to take note of the issues that these AA. raise and to contribute as effectively as possible to the debate. To assume that the solution lies in a simple "live and let live" approach (itself derivative of Western forms of religion) is to underestimate the seriousness of the matter. A truly tolerant and pluralist society can only be established if the concepts themselves are subject to scrutiny, a task which is central to the sociological agenda.
- 6 And given the Muslim request to be treated primarily as a religious community – not as a racial or national one – this agenda should, surely, involve the sociologist of religion in particular.