Introduction

This chapter focuses on the current legal and social situation of Christians living in Muslim-majority states. These states range from those that define themselves as Islamic or where Islam is the established or state religion to others that are officially or in practice secular. Examples of the former are Iran, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States and Pakistan, while examples of the latter include Albania, Bangladesh and Turkey. Indonesia, with the world’s largest Muslim population, officially affirms belief in God as a national principle but effectively operates as a secular state. One barometer of rights and opportunities for Christians in Muslim-majority states that this chapter explores is whether they enjoy any provision for religious instruction in their own tradition within the public education system, and what this instruction comprises.

At the time of writing, the political and legal setting in a number of Arab Muslim states is fluid, as civil unrest or war follows the collapse of dictatorial regimes. For example, in Syria and Iraq various factions compete for dominance. Depending on whether relations between the Muslim majority and minorities are good or strained, the latter may experience restrictions and hostility. Where there are larger non-Muslim populations as well as greater religious diversity, Christian-Muslim relations are predictably often friendly. One issue here is that some sources exaggerate or downplay good relations of this kind, depending on whether they want to depict Islam as inherently intolerant of Christianity, indeed as anti-Christian, or whether they dispute this. The singling out and murdering of Coptic Christians in Libya by ISIS-affiliated operatives (21 beheaded in February 2015) and of Christians in Kenya by Al-Shabaab (127 killed at Garissa College in April 2015 after failing to recite Qur’anic verses in Arabic) may be represented variously as incidents of Muslim hostility towards Christianity or as barbaric acts that contradict core Muslim values which are more fully exemplified by the Common Word initiative launched in 2007, calling for friendship and humanitarian cooperation. Christian communities may be ancient, as in Syria and Egypt, or the result of more recent missionary outreach. The latter more than the former may be represented by some Muslims as too closely allied with Western interests, and therefore potentially disloyal. Geographical and ethnic specifics also affect the ways in which Muslims and Christians interact. For example, in Nigeria Christians, who mainly live in the oil-rich south and are generally wealthier and better educated than Muslims in the north, are targeted as Western agents by Boko Haram, with numerous attacks against them and incidents of retaliation in turn.
The exploration of current contexts in this chapter cannot describe the situation in every Muslim-majority state, but in order to cover as many contexts as possible it selects representative examples and indicates where similar situations exist elsewhere.

**Non-Muslims under Muslim rule: the classical period**

The rights and status of non-Muslims living under Islamic rule were traditionally defined by legal conventions and statutes derived from Qur’anic verses such as 9:29 (‘Fight those who do not believe in Allah . . . who do not adopt the religion of truth from those who were given the Scripture – until they give the jizya while they are humbled’), from Ḥadīths or sayings of Muhammad and from accounts of how Muḥammad related to Christians, Jews and other People of the Book (ahl al-kitāb). The Pact of ʿUmar, often attributed to the second caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 634–4), or else to the Umayyad caliph ʿUmar II (r. 717–20), is also important, as are early conventions regulating military engagement, including Q 22:40 and Abū Bakr’s rules which protect synagogues and churches from damage and monks, among other noncombatants, from harm.

Classically, People of the Book were permitted to practise their religion, govern their internal affairs and, with certain restrictions, take part in commercial and civil life alongside Muslims. They were free to nurture their children in their faith and to establish educational and other institutions to serve their own community, though they could not evangelise Muslims. Leaders of each protected community, who were appointed with the Muslim ruler’s approval, were responsible for collecting taxes in their community, and they represented their community at the caliph’s court. One restriction was that dhimmīs did not bear arms, because in principle payment of tribute guaranteed them the protection of the state. In fact, non-Muslims sometimes did serve in the military or fight for Muslim rulers. Thus, in 639 the Christians in Antioch signed a pact that allowed them to serve in the Muslim army with all the ‘rights of soldiers, including a share in the spoils’ (Courbage and Fargues 1997: 13), while in the Iberian Peninsula, El Cid (1043–99) fought both for Muslim rulers and also against them (Fletcher 2003: 89).

Jizya was a per capita tax levied on men of military age who were capable of armed service; priests and monks were thus exempt. Often initially fixed by a treaty, the amount varied. Conventions stipulated an affordable level, although they were usually higher than the taxes paid by Muslims. It could be used to offset military and administrative expenses, while the Muslim equivalent tax, zakāt, could only be used for pious purposes within the community. It was not unusual for non-Muslims to convert in order to pay less tax, although converts were sometimes still required to pay jizya because Muslim rulers preferred this more flexible revenue (Courbage and Fargues 1997: 23). Collection of jizya was sometimes accompanied by its bearers being seized by the beard and struck on the head or beneath the ear to indicate their subordinate status, based on an interpretation of part of Q 9:29, wa-hum sāghirūn, ‘while they are humbled’.

Under Muslim rule dhimmīs often participated in many areas of public life. They occupied government posts, including senior ones, although some rulers prohibited this and removed any non-Muslims from office. Thus, the ʿAbbasid Caliph al-Muʿtaṣim (r. 833–42) employed two Christian ministers, one in finance, while his successor al-Wāthic (842–7) dismissed all Christians from his administration (Courbage and Fargues 1997: 25). At times, dhimmīs were even included among the advisers of Muslim rulers.

At times too, non-Muslims took part in wider intellectual and scholarly life in the Islamic world, best known among them maybe Hunayn ibn Ishāq, who was acknowledged as a master translator in the ʿAbbasid court in the ninth century, and Yahyā ibn ʿAdi, who moved in Baghdad philosophical circles in the tenth century. In the same period in al-Andalus, Christian scholars participated with Muslims and Jews in collaborative academic pursuits.
The term *dhimmī* has been rendered ‘protected minority’, though non-Muslims were frequently majorities in Muslim society: even in the Fertile Crescent it took about three centuries before Muslims emerged as a small majority. Contrary to stereotypical ideas of Islam being spread by the sword, large numbers of non-Muslims continued to live under Muslim rule for very long periods, and at times their numbers increased. For example, in the Ottoman census for Syria, Lebanon and Palestine in 1580 the numbers of Christians and Jews were 8.1 and 0.9 per cent respectively, while by 1882 they were 24.5 and 1.3 per cent (Courbage and Fargues 1997: 82), an increase that was partly due to higher birth rates, partly (for Jews) due to settlement from elsewhere where persecution was rampant, though also a result of *dhimmīs* not fighting wars (Courbage and Fargues 1997: 115).

At least in the early period, places of worship were sometimes shared. Thus, after the conquest of Damascus, Muslims prayed in one half of the cathedral and Christians in another, while a church in Homs ‘provided shelter for the services of the two religions for four centuries’ (Courbage and Fargues 1997: 10–11). It was actually the arrival of Christian crusaders from Europe that ended this tradition. Ancient Christian communities share much culturally with Muslims, despite the use of a variety of languages in worship. In the late twentieth century, Prince El Hassan of Jordan wrote about the shared cultural legacy and common interests of Arab Christians and Muslims and urged Christians not to leave their Arab homelands because he thought the fundamentalist trend would not endure (El Hassan bin Talal 1998: 106).

Some contemporary contexts: residual limitations

The *dhimmī* system has not survived intact into the modern period (although traces of it are surprisingly prevalent). The Ottoman Empire effectively ended its version of it, the *millet* system, with the Reform Edict of 1856, which extended equal citizenship to everyone in the empire regardless of religion. Elsewhere, where European powers took over Muslim populations as colonies, protectorates or, after World War I, as League of Nations mandate territories, Islamic systems – educational, legal and administrative – were almost entirely dismantled, or fell into disuse. In Lebanon and Syria, the Ottoman pattern of Muslim schools receiving state-funds and of Christian schools receiving private funding was more or less reversed under the French mandates (Thompson 2000: 79). In many Muslim-majority states today, statutes protect religious freedom and criminalise discrimination, although some aspects of the classical system can still be detected. For example, non-Muslims may retain autonomy with respect to the legalising of marriages and divorce, and in certain other areas of personal law. Egypt abolished religious courts in 1955, so that all cases, including any with religious aspects, go before the secular national courts (Edge 1990: 43).

However, in Muslim countries laws that do not explicitly discriminate against non-Muslims may actually do so in practice. In Malaysia, for example, where Christians make up 9.2% of the population, zoning regulations are applied to restrict the construction of new churches, and non-Muslims are forbidden from using the Arabic word Allāh in print, following a 2007 Ministry of Home Affairs ruling. Most Christians in Malaysia are non-Malay, which adds ethnic tension to the dynamic. Constitutionally, the policy of * bumiputera* (‘sons of the soil’) privileges native Malays over others in gaining government posts, scholarships and commercial licenses (see Hodges-Aebhard and Raskin 1997: 58), meaning that Muslims have an automatic advantage because all native Malays are legally regarded as Muslims. Christian evangelism is socially unacceptable, although not strictly illegal, while Christian literature is legally limited to a Christian readership. On the other hand, some government funding in Malaysia is spent on Christian schools, which is unusual in the Islamic world. At least one other example of this is in Senegal, where Christians represent just 2% of the population (Kuru and Stepan 2012: 99). Here there are also state-aided...
church schools, though the majority of students attending are Muslim. This phenomenon of Muslims attending Christian-run schools and colleges, which are often looked on as prestigious institutions, is widespread. These include the American Universities of Beirut (founded in 1862 by US Protestants) and of Cairo (founded in 1919 by American Presbyterians), which are ranked first in their countries.

In Indonesia, where Christians number about 10%, an unusual development has seen Christians attend private Muslim schools. In several schools run by Muhammadiyah, Indonesia’s second largest Muslim organisation, between half and three-quarters of students are Christian, with parents reportedly ‘unconcerned that learning in a Muslim school would pose a threat to their children’s religious beliefs’ (Rohman 2012).

Indonesia provides religious education in pupils’ own faith within its public education system, though by contrast several Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Oman, where Christians are all or almost all noncitizens, offer no public provision for Christian education and restrict Christian activities: for example, in Saudi Arabia there are no churches, and in state schools Islam is taught to all pupils. Morocco, too, teaches Islam to all pupils, including Jews and Christians (each representing less than one per cent), although the constitution protects religious freedom.

In many Muslim states, non-Muslims hold positions in government. Thus, in Bangladesh, where Christians number only 0.3% of the population, the Christian Promode Mankin was a minister of state from 2009 to 2012 and represented a majority-Muslim constituency. Similarly, in Jordan Christians serve in senior diplomatic, military and government offices, and there are almost always Christians in the cabinet; Jordan introduced the option of Christian studies for Christians in 1997 (Leirvik 2010: 1043). Pakistan’s fourth chief justice was a Christian and, notoriously, in Iraq Tariq Aziz, Saddam Hussein’s deputy prime minister, was a Christian. In Egypt, among the current 33 cabinet members three are Christian, including a woman (one of the first three women at this level). In many countries, there is a constitutional bar on non-Muslims serving as head of state.

Some states hold separate elections for non-Muslims: Pakistan reserves 10 out of 342 seats for non-Muslims, while Iran reserves 2 out of 290 seats for Armenian Christians and one for the Assyrian Church of the East. Some Egyptians have called for a quota of seats for Copts.

Laws may have a disproportionate impact on Christians. For example, half of those prosecuted under Pakistan’s Blasphemy Law have been non-Muslims (Christians comprise 1.6% of the total population; on the Blasphemy Law, see Waldbridge 2012: 81–104).

Pakistan, founded as a state for India’s Muslims, was conceived by Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876–1946) with Turkey as a model, secular but with Islamic ethos, laws and values. In the early years, there was a quota system that made places available for Christians and Hindus in higher education, as well as in the military and government service. However, under President Zia al-Haq an Islamisation process was begun (during which the Blasphemy Law was introduced). In 1972 some village-level Christian schools were nationalised, with the result that fewer Christians had access to education – elite Christian institutions remained private. The prestigious Forman Christian College in Lahore was also nationalised in 1972 and run by the state until 2003, when it was handed back to the Presbyterian Church (USA). Islamic education in state schools was made compulsory for all students, Muslim and non-Muslim, though in 2009 a new policy allowed non-Muslims to take an alternative course in ethics and Pakistan studies from the third grade. Minorities complain that Muslim perspectives dominate the curriculum with little reference to other religions, and that the alternative to Islamic studies should be Hindu or Christian studies, not ethics. They say that texts used in Islamic studies contain negative references to Hindus and Christians (Leo 2009: 72). Since 2001, Pakistan has required all religiously affiliated schools to register with the government.
The colonial legacy: positive and negative impact

The experience of Christians under Muslim rule has varied greatly. In places where their presence dates back centuries, such as Egypt and Syria (9–10%), they were often participants in the anti-colonial, nationalist struggle together with Muslims and were regarded as co-founders of the modern state. The Coptic archpriest Qommus Sergius (1883–1964) became a national hero in Egypt for encouraging anti-colonial revolution in a 1919 speech at al-Azhar (Ibrahim 2011: 92). Where Christians took part in nationalist struggles they tended to enjoy better conditions, although Islamist opposition to postindependence regimes that were perceived as too Western and insufficiently Islamic often fomented hostility towards them. In Egypt, following the 2011 ousting of Hosni Mubarak after almost 30 years of de facto totalitarian rule, reports of attacks on Christian property and individuals increased dramatically under the new government dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood. This growth in hostility was the consequence of the legalising of sectarian politics, allowing supporters of Islamist versions of statehood to participate openly. But one positive response to worsened relations has seen Muslim and Christian intellectuals produce the Al-Azhar Human Rights Bill on Egypt’s future, calling for equality, democracy and respect for human rights. This was published in January 2012, with the endorsement of the Coptic Pope Tawadros II. At Christmas 2011, inspired by Mohamed El-Sawy, thousands of Muslims joined hands to protect Coptic churches, forming a human shield against attack (El Rashidi 2011). A month later, El-Sawy became Minister of Culture.

In 1993, an ethics curriculum that stressed common values between Jews, Christians and Muslims and sought to ‘promote ethical norms and citizenship’ (Sayed 2006: 35) was produced jointly by al-Azhar University, Cairo’s ancient seat of Islamic learning, and the Coptic Church (Leirvik 2010: 1043). Christian studies had been offered to Christian students in public schools in Egypt since 1907, provided a school had at least 15 Christian students. In 1951, this number requirement was dropped. In return, Muslims attending Christian schools received instruction in Islamic studies. A requirement in the 1930s that all secondary school children during the first two years should take an examination on the Qurʾān met opposition from Christians, after which Christians were exempted. Some Egyptian Christians complain that while their taxes go to supporting Islamic education, Christian schools do not receive any state support, and critics point out that the new values and ethics curriculum still perpetuates negative stereotypes of Jews as deceitful (Leirvik 2006: 86).

Although Turkey is officially secular, it privileges Islam within the state and the state-funded system. No non-Muslim schools receive state aid, and only Islamic religious studies are offered. Until 1950, religious education was ‘banned’ at all levels, but then, when multiparty politics and religiously based parties were allowed, Islamic instruction was introduced as a compulsory subject. Non-Muslims could withdraw, though no alternative form of instruction was provided. In addition, state-funded Islamic schools were introduced as alternatives to secular education.

In 1982, a religious culture and ethics knowledge course replaced the older curriculum, which had taught Islam as a monolithic, monochrome system of Ḥanafī Sunnī Islam. The new curriculum was produced by scholars at the University of Ankara and included ‘non-Islamic religions’ and non-Sunnī versions of Islam (Kaymakcan 2006: 457). The current syllabus, which was introduced in 2011, provides religious instruction for Christians within a curriculum that includes Islam.

After Syrian independence in 1945, Christians in the country enjoyed generally good relations with the Muslim majority. Since 1963, the secular, pan-Arab policies of the Ba’ath party, which was founded by a Christian, Michel Aflaq, have actually minimised sectarian rivalry by ensuring equality of opportunity for different religious communities, although the Alawites, to which the
ruling al-Assad family belong, have had a ‘disproportionate amount of political control and influence’ (Chang and Clott 2014: 117). Following the outbreak of civil resistance to Bashar al-Assad’s regime, attacks on Christians increased, and great numbers have fled. On the other hand, there is evidence of increased Christian support for Assad ‘from a fear of a hypothetical post-Assad targeting of Christians in the face of strengthening Islamist political and social groups’ (Chang and Clott 2014: 117, citing a BBC report from 23 April 2013). After independence, private church-run schools and private Muslim schools were nationalised as part of the nonsectarian policy. Provision is now made for non-Muslims (Christian, Druze) and also for various Muslim groups to receive religious instruction in their own faith (Aldosari 2007: 272). A few private schools have opened since nationalisation, and these follow the state curriculum.

In parts of the world where the presence of Christians is associated with colonialism, under which missions were permitted and sometimes encouraged, their postindependence status is more ambiguous. Although they may in law be equal citizens, they can be regarded as alien and out of step with the rest of the nation. Such is the case in Algeria and Tunisia. Following independence, in Algeria the language of instruction was changed from French to Arabic, private schools were integrated into the state system with a curriculum intended to foster national identity, and existing church-related schools were seized. Many Christians left the country. In 2003, private schools were again allowed, and since that time several Christian schools have opened, though they report difficulties and hostility including deportation of teachers and enforced closure.

The attitude towards Christians as relics from colonialism with suspect loyalties also exists in Pakistan and Bangladesh. On the one hand, there is a history of cordial relations between Bangladesh’s various religious communities, and today the country is officially secular, but on the other hand, Islamist extremists (who attract minimal support in elections) target Christians, often alleging that foreign and indigenous NGOs working, for example, to empower women are part of a conspiracy to undermine Islam (Riaz 2004: 81). In the 1970s and 1980s hardly any Christians felt the need to leave Bangladesh because of discrimination, though today there is a substantial Christian Bangladeshi diaspora. Christians in Bangladesh run their own schools and hospitals, while the state system offers religious instruction in Christian studies, which is supposed to be taught by Christian instructors. Christians complain that teachers are either under-qualified or non-Christian. Bangladesh’s politics has been dominated by two parties, the Islam-oriented Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the secular Awami League. A constitutional change in 1975 that dropped secularism as a state principle was reversed in the 15th Amendment of 2011. During the more pro-Islamic identity period the Bible Society published the Injil Sharif (gospel in Musalman Bangla), which became very popular. A two-month ban in 1990 was lifted after the Baptist World Alliance objected. However, more recently, in April 2008 the first ever formal dialogue between Bangladeshi Muslims (35 delegates) and Christians (35 delegates), convened by Dhaka University’s Department of World Religions, took place in response to A Common Word.

Where violence affects Christian–Muslim relations

In many places there is violence against Christians and also discrimination, though these should not be taken as characteristic of Christian experience in Muslim-majority states. Across the 57 member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the majority of Christians enjoy cordial relations with their Muslim neighbours. A Pew Research poll of 38 Muslim-majority states found that only seven described religious conflict as a major problem, namely Niger, Nigeria, Djibouti, Pakistan, Tunisia, Lebanon and the Palestinian Territory. Least concerned with violence were most of the Central Asian ‘Stans’, while the majority of respondents were more concerned
Christian minorities in Islamic countries

with crime and economic issues (Pew Research 2013: graph Q8b). The same poll showed that most East European and South Asian Muslims, who did not express concerns about religious conflict, did not consider evangelising non-Muslims as a duty.

Where violence and conflict exist, analysis of contributory factors should take into account the role of ethnic difference, the distribution of wealth and power, access to education and economic opportunities, and religious affiliation. Historical contexts such as al-Andalus under Muslim rule and much of Bosnia's pre-civil war history provide examples of Christians and Muslims living and working together peacefully and mutually prospering. For centuries, Christians and Muslims in Lebanon lived together in a peaceful, pluralist and prosperous society. After independence, a consociational system of governance was put in place to ensure the just treatment of different communities and to prevent discrimination and any one community gaining too much power. Change in demographics has endangered this, which is typical of contexts where traditional harmony becomes threatened. Sadly, centuries of good relations can change when circumstances alter perceptions and yesterday’s friends become today’s rivals for power and wealth. In Nigeria, Christian–Muslim hostility is fueled by economic disparity between the north and south and by Christian dominance in certain areas, especially where educational achievement is involved. Anti-Christian sentiment mingles with anti-Western sentiment, as some Muslims blame their economic situation on failure to implement Islamic values fully, which Christians resist. In 1999, 12 out of Nigeria’s 36 states set up Islamic courts, provoking Christian protests that some laws, including those concerning apostasy and blasphemy, may be used against Christians. Much violence has followed. The challenge for Nigeria is to find ways to protect freedom of religion but more urgently perhaps to address issues surrounding equal economic and employment opportunities. A counternarrative points to many examples of interreligious families in Nigeria, representing Christian–Muslim solidarity.

From conflict to cooperation

Surprisingly maybe, several Muslim-majority states where Christians are either guest labourers or workers or represent a small minority have nonetheless made important contributions to improve Christian–Muslim relations. The Sultan of Oman has endowed a Chair at the University of Oxford in the Abrahamic Faiths, promoting Jewish–Christian–Muslim friendship. Prince Alwaleed bin-Talal of Saudi Arabia has endowed the Center for Muslim–Christian Understanding at Georgetown University, while the Jordanian royal family fund the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies and in 2007 launched the Common Word initiative, which encourages Muslims and Christians to cooperate based on the principles of love for God and love for others. Christians and Muslims are collaborating in the Alexandria Process, launched in January 2002, which aims to achieve a lasting peace between Israelis and the Palestinians. The former secretary-general of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, met Pope Francis in December 2013, calling for Christian–Muslim friendship and humanitarian service. Such encouragement has had some local impact. In Egypt, the Misr Foundation is working with the Anglican diocese to provide medical assistance and opportunities for young people to learn music and engage in art.

Representations of Christian experience in majority-Muslim areas can suffer from selective amnesia, exaggerating hostility or harmony. There are many reports of Muslims destroying churches and of Christians retaliating. Some point to Indonesia in this respect, but a few also record how Christian–Muslim cooperation in NGOs committed to democratic pluralism has contributed to the ‘almost 100% national consensus that Indonesia has to be a democracy’ (Magnis-Suseno 2010: 123; on the destruction of churches, see pp. 115–16).
References

Fletcher, R. (2003), The cross and the crescent: Christianity and Islam from Muhammad to the reformation, London: Allen Lane.

Further reading