Islam has always known some kind of "theology of religions", that is, a quite consistent theological concept of the relationship between Islam and non-Muslim religions. This concept found its corresponding manifestation in juridical categories dealing with particular issues of the interrelationship between adherents of non-Muslim communities and the umma. Though in practice, and depending on specific historical, cultural, and political contexts, juridical regulations and categories had been applied in a flexible manner, we can nevertheless observe the emergence of some mainline traditions in dealing with questions of religious plurality. Against the background of the European expansion and with the rise of modern nation states in the sphere of the "Muslim World", these traditions have entered national legislation, from where they are applied to the specific political settings. Again, this varies from context to context, and from country to country. So in analysing the status of religious minorities in an Islamic context (non-Muslim, but likewise Muslim or even "heretical"), it makes sense to design any research in this field by setting it up in the legal framework of nation states and investigating into the implications of the specific statutory injunctions.

This is basically the scenery into which the author of this study has located her research, taking the situation in Egypt as her subject of investigation. However, she is not just using a "top—down" perspective in looking for fixed legal provisions pertaining to religious minorities. Rather, she investigates into the impact of New Religious Communities (NRC) on the development of Egyptian society in the course of the 20th century, thereby focussing on legislation and jurisdiction as well as on the portrayal of those NRC in the print media. To round off her findings, the author evaluates fatāwā, bulletins of both Muslim and Christian religious experts and authorities as well as theological publications. This approach provides a broad spectrum of analytical tools for disclosing the multifaceted mutual interaction between different domains in society and the state.

The inquiry proceeds in three steps: First, the author provides an overview of the historical and doctrinal development of the various NRC in Egypt. Thereby, she does not present an in-depth analysis from the perspective of Religious Studies. Rather, her presentation aims at placing these groups within the broader political, societal and religious spectrum of 20th century Egypt. Then, the author analyses the statutory position of these NRC in the Egyptian legal system. She does so by outlining the status of post-Qur’ānic religious communities in Islamic law; by presenting policies of legal recognition of, or ban on, NRC in Egypt; by exemplifying selected juridical questions pertaining to problems of status and everyday life of these communities — from marriage through citizenship to military service; by investigating into the penal consequences deriving from the legal injunctions in this field; by highlighting the specific problem of "mission"; and by discussing the crucial question of potential tensions between freedom of religion and public order. This, she argues, reflects the more
fundamental conflict between Human Rights, on the one hand, and a legislation which is based on religious provisions, on the other. Thirdly, the author presents a profile of public opinion(s) on NRC by observing responses to the same from the social and religious environment they live in, by analysing the image of these communities in the Egyptian print media, and by evaluating their portrayal in Christian and Muslim religious literature. In her final chapter, the author summarizes “the case of Egypt” by focussing on the implementation of freedom of religion in view of NRC.

As to the legal status of the communities under consideration, her findings are quite variegated: On the juridical level, for example, due to their early arrival in the country and a political atmosphere which was very conducive to religious tolerance at that time, communities like the Seven Days Adventists are officially recognized and registered as a church. At the other end of the spectrum, communities like the Bahá’í or Jehovah’s Witnesses have been dissolved and banned. On the level of public opinion, NRC are eyed suspiciously, and this negative attitude can be found both among Muslims and Copts. Generally speaking, legislation, public opinion, and the media view freedom of religion as a basic right which is, however, restricted to the sphere of individual belief. When it comes to public expressions of faith, this is seen as a privilege reserved exclusively for the adherents of those religions officially recognized by Islam. At the very heart of juridical discourses is the category “public order” which is closely related to efforts at substantiating the supremacy of the šarīʿa. “Evidently”, the author concludes, “public order is seen by the Egyptian courts as something safeguarding peace in the society by protecting vested interests of the majorities’ religions, whereas in comparison to that, freedom of religion as an individual right and as a minorities’ right has to stand back” (p. 402). Though there are some Egyptian intellectuals who are prepared to “break off from the consensus” for the sake of a comprehensive understanding of freedom of religion, they make up just a vanishing minority. Among them, Faraḍ Fūda, one of the most outspoken Egyptian intellectuals, vehemently addressed this issue by calling for the full implementation of the right of religious freedom. As a testimony to this position, his speech on the occasion of a conference of the Egyptian organization for Human Rights, just two months before he was murdered by Islamic terrorists, is documented by the author who draws the same conclusion as Fūda: “If there will ever be a liberalization in the attitudes towards freedom of religion—be it in the general public, in the political realm, or in the domain of legislation—, this development will need many years to go, maybe decades” (p. 402).

The author has done a marvellous job in collecting data and providing in-depth information on the topic from very different sources like fatāwā, reports and news in the media, published and unpublished writings, the Internet, interviews, etc. Thus, the strength of this publication lies in the field of describing and processing as well as interpreting a great variety of material. However, where the author enters discourses belonging to the primary domain of Religious Studies, she develops highly individual interpretations of categories and concepts which are not always compatible to those