

## **Identity Crisis**

### **Religious Registration in the Middle East**

Author: Jonathan Andrews

Jonathan Andrews' "Identity Crisis- Religious Registration in the Middle East" in an eminently readable journey through the out-workings of Religious Registration. This system, which identifies every person as an adherent of a particular religion, was crafted under the Ottomans and is still prevalent across the Middle East. Andrews' text is now recommended reading for our mission's North Africa/ Middle East/ Central Asia Advisory Council.

Why? It presents a most thoroughly current, objective, historical, nuanced, and prophetic message about this complex and confusing reality.

Current? With a publication date of 2016, it demonstrates how the Arab Awakening of 2011 now challenges the way religious registrations are being applied.

Objective? We quickly grasp that religious registration is not about belief or practice, but rather about the rigid application of legal codes to family law matters such as marriage and divorce, the custody and education of children, burial and inheritance.

Historical? The evolution of the Millet System, created under Ottoman law to enable minorities to conduct family matters, is explained, and "the light goes on" as we see how a system once designed to protect minorities has come to harm them.

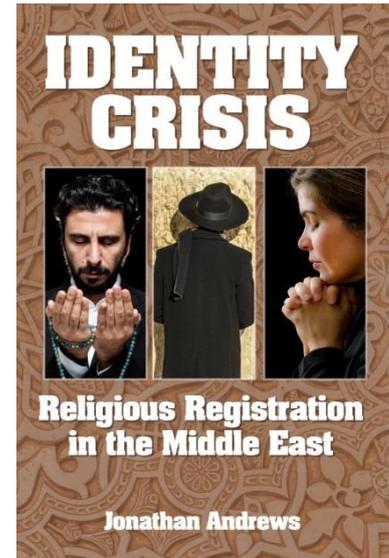
Nuanced? Andrews reveals the ways that religious registration not only brings difficulties to Christians and to Muslims who choose to follow Christ, but also how it feeds prejudices within Islam (Sunni vs. Shia) and Judaism (e.g. for Israeli citizens unable to marry in Israel because their claims to being Jewish are rejected by the religious authorities.)

And prophetic? A host of considerations is proposed so that current injustices created by this system can be addressed to promote societies where all can flourish. The decriminalization of apostasy, the stimulation of an entrepreneurial spirit within patronage societies in order to create employment opportunities, the insistence of the clear rule of law, and the promotion of greater pluralism (i.e. addressing the "pluralism deficit")-- these are some of Andrews' clarion calls for change.

The text was born out of a plea from Middle Eastern Christians to "Help us find a way through." Andrews' insights help us as well.

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