

Book Review

Lori G. Beaman, *Reasonable Accommodation: Managing Religious Diversity*. University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 2012, pp. vi + 239, ISBN 978-0-774-82265-7.

Issues of multiculturalism and multireligious societies are becoming increasingly important in academia and beyond, so this work edited by a prominent scholar in the field is a welcome contribution to the debates. The term 'Reasonable Accommodation' that lends the book its title is taken from the Canadian context of public, political and legal discussion about the status of 'new' or 'minority' groups in Canada, and so the work clearly bridges academic questions and the fields beyond in a useful way. The text appears intended to be used as a textbook for courses covering issues of religion, multiculturalism and social cohesion in the Canadian context, and while not only Canada is covered the strong focus on that country makes this the natural place and use for this book, and its application beyond this, apart from a few chapters, is limited. However, for its purpose it appears an excellent book, while some notable chapters could well be employed elsewhere.

Beaman provides a useful Introduction and Conclusion that interrogates the notion of 'Reasonable Accommodation' and although focused upon Canada both essays raise generic issues about the problems of public and political discourse in this area in ways that could be applicable elsewhere. Eight chapters by other scholars make up the intervening space with half of that number focusing upon Canada, while one focuses on the contrasting discourses in France and Britain, another on Australia, and two do not have a country-specific focus. The chapters focusing on Canada all make interesting reading, although anyone wishing to use a chapter from here for teaching about Canada from a different country may find Beaman's Introduction and Conclusion more useful. In some cases, at least, there seems to be an assumption of familiarity with certain disputes, issues or cultural norms that means an external reader has to do quite a lot of work, while some issues are fairly technical and do not give a wide perspective on engagement with that country. Readers with a wide interest in these issues globally though may well find much of interest in them.

Among the other chapters, Natasha Bakht's chapter on responses to veiling which roams over various countries is, I would say, the best single overview I have read on this topic and usefully brings the literature and ideas together well and insightfully. It is certainly one I would consider giving to students looking at this issue. The chapters by James Beckford, on Britain and France, and Gary Bouma, on Australia, are, as may be expected from scholars of such repute, excellent overviews, and again probably bring into one place the best existing short summary of these issues that exists. Again, they would be ideal reading to get students into the topic. Ole Riis's chapter, which is more theoretical, on issues of pluralism, identity and multiculturalism in relation to religion, is not so successful. While it contains some good and insightful material, parts are not as clear as could be hoped.

In conclusion, I imagine that for courses in Canada on these issues this book will be the text of choice for quite a few years; for students and scholars beyond Canada there are both chapters here which will usefully introduce Canadian discussions in the area, as well as three particularly good chapters by Bakht, Beckford and Bouma which explore areas beyond. I can certainly see myself using these with students in relevant courses and teaching. I have spoken of this text mainly for its use as a textbook and generally that seems its function as, while there may be some areas which are not much discussed elsewhere, the chapters seem focused very much upon a student audience. Various chapters, however, include some insightful comments and references to aspects of theory or insights into discussions that will no doubt strike new chords even with seasoned scholars. On the whole, the book is a welcome and useful addition to literature in this area.

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