

Dietmar W. Winkler, ed., *Syriac Christianity in the Middle East and India: Contributions and Challenges*, Pro Oriente: Studies in Syriac Tradition 2 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013). Pp. xiii + 168; hardcover, \$165.49.

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Pro Oriente is an organization founded in 1964, under the auspices of the Archdiocese of Vienna, to improve relations between the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches. To this end the foundation has held several unofficial dialogues with leaders of the Syriac churches which have made significant contributions to the official positions of these churches. The title reviewed here is the second in the *Pro Oriente Studies in Syriac Tradition* series published by Gorgias Press and is comprised of work presented at Pro Oriente's second Colloquium Syriacum, held in Vienna, Austria on November 4–6, 2009.¹ The present volume is divided into four parts, addressing the contributions of Syriac-speaking Christian communities to society in India and the Middle East, the challenges facing those communities, the subject of emigration, and the visit of Pope Benedict to the Holy Land.

Baby Varghese devotes his chapter to the contributions of the Syriac communities in Kerala in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, focusing on the areas of education, print culture, politics, and the economy. Varghese describes a vibrant community increasingly able to contribute to its society. His review of the political activity of Christians in the early twentieth century contrasts with the traditional presentations of their place within Indian society. The classic narrative highlights the tolerance of Indian culture and stresses the Christians' high status due to the fact that the earliest converts were Brahmins, an approach exemplified later in this volume in the essays of Philip Nelpuraparambil and Mar Theophilose

¹ The first volume of the series was entitled *Syriac Churches Encountering Islam* and was based on the first Colloquium Syriacum, held November 14–16, 2007. A third colloquium took place on November 9–11, 2011 to discuss the special Synod for the Middle East which took place in Rome in October of 2010, and a fourth was held September 19–22, 2013, considering the theme "Towards a Culture of Co-Existence in Pluralistic Societies in the Middle East and in India." The papers from the last two colloquia have yet to be published.

Kuriakose. However, Varghese tells the story of a disenfranchised community contending for equality.

Herman Teule's essay focuses on the experience of Syriac communities in post-Saddam Iraq. After an overview of the different Christian communities active within Iraq, he addresses the issues of political clout, security, and the potential of Kurdish cooperation. He notes strong signs of interest in cooperation among the various Syriac communities in the country, portraying a vivid image of communities responding to an Iraq that provides greater potential for political participation yet where security is uncertain. Teule also addresses divergent opinions within these communities regarding whether they ought to assert, or even perceive, themselves as ethnic or national entities.

Philip Nelpuraparambil discusses Syriac Christianity in light of Indian religious tolerance. He opens with a description of the Indian constitution, effective since January 1950, as it relates to religious freedom and education, highlighting the role of Christians in the formation of the constitution and the educational systems. He then offers a survey of the history of Christian education in India. His overall positive outlook is tempered only by noting recent developments of "hate campaigns" against minorities within the country, efforts by atheists to modify the curriculum, and a decline both in the overall Christian population and in the number of those assuming religious vocations.

Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim considers the challenges facing Syriac-speaking Christians in Syria and Turkey. Building on a brief survey of relations between non-Muslim communities and the state up to the Treaty of Lausanne (July 1923), the author first turns to Turkey. Focusing primarily on legal status and the effects of Turkey's ambition to be admitted into the European Union, Mar Gregorios' tone regarding Turkey is hopeful. He is still more positive when he turns to his homeland, Syria, where his emphasis on legal status continues, particularly regarding education and family law. Though published in 2013, this paper was delivered in 2009, preceding the tensions that erupted in 2011. It is deeply saddening that Mar Gregorios' positive outlook on the situation in his country and the "full liberty" for Christians there of which he speaks (67) has been overrun by civil strife, into which even he himself has been caught up. Mar Gregorios was abducted along with Greek Orthodox Bishop Boulos Yazigi on April 22, 2013. As of the

composition of this review, they remain missing. This author shares the earnest hope for their swift release.

Mar Paul Matar addresses the case of Lebanon. Considering Islamo-Christian dialogue, he examines the common “dialogue of life” that is embodied in people’s daily lives, over against the formal dialogue of specialists. He focuses first on religious liberty, lauding Lebanese society for allowing both freedom of worship (practice) and freedom of belief (affiliation), unlike some of its neighbors who only permit the former. He stresses the value of Lebanon’s system of political representation, which guarantees representation to minorities.

Mar Theophilose Kuriakose takes up the situation of Syriac Christians emigrating from India. He opens with a brief overview of the history of Syriac Christianity in southern India. Focusing solely on his own Syrian Orthodox community, which he suggests is a representative sample, he addresses major causes of emigration over the past two centuries, breaking down the particularities of the experiences of emigrants and their families by major destination regions: Europe, the US, and the Gulf.

Dietmar Winkler surveys the demographics of Syriac Christianity in the Middle East. Winkler begins with a look at the effects of the Arab conquest on the Christian population, drawing largely on Philippe Fargues’ work to show how the Christian majority slowly dwindled because of intermarriage and conversion.² Next Winkler addresses the causes for the thriving of the Christian population under the Ottoman Empire and the reasons for the reverse of these gains in the wake of World War I, before concluding with demographic data for Christianity in the Near East, by country.

Martin Tamcke shows that Syriac Christian emigration from the Middle East began largely due to politico-economic factors in the nineteenth century. His account contains several personal stories of migration that reveal the struggles of migrants, and the

² Winkler refers to Youssef Courbage and Philippe Fargues, *Chrétiens et Juifs dans l’Islam arabe et turc* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1992) and Philippe Fargues, “The Arab Christians in the Middle East: A Demographic Perspective,” in *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East: The Challenge of the Future*, ed. Andrea Pacini (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 48–66.

differences in the ex-patriot experience from one generation to the next.

Frans Bouwen discusses the shift from a state of general disapproval of Pope Benedict XVI visiting the Holy Land, evident before the visit was planned, to a state of welcome and even approval once the trip was announced and undertaken in 2009. The majority of the chapter focuses on the pope's agenda and its potential legacy. Bouwen also illuminates the personal struggle of the Syriac Christians in their efforts to participate in the pope's visit.

It seems worth noting that the second of the three appendices, a final report on the Second Colloquium Syriacum from which the papers for this volume came, reveals that there were two presenters at the meeting whose papers are not included in the present volume. These are Karam Rizk, who presented a paper entitled "Cultural, Social and Educational Contributions of Syriac Christianity in Syria and Lebanon," and Anthony O'Mahony, who read "The Church-State Relations in Modern Iraq."

While this book is certainly of interest to academics who work in Syriac-speaking Christianity, the volume will appeal to anyone working on the intersections of religion and society, especially minority religions in colonial and post-colonial contexts. Many of these essays are reports more than scholarly articles, hence the paucity of citations in a number of places. Of course, this is partly due to the fact that several of the authors were reporting on contemporary events for which there were limited references, indeed an aspect of the value of their work. Therefore, readers will often have to figure out on their own where to look for further insight or documentation. Regardless, the chapters presented in this volume are valuable contributions to our understanding of the Syriac Church(es) and fertile ground for further inquiry.