

Bailey, Betty Jane and J. Martin. *Who are the Christians in the Middle East?*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003, xii + 234 pages, \$20.00 paper. ISBN 0-8028-1020-9

The title of Betty Jane and J. Martin Bailey's book asks a provocative question: just exactly who are the Christians in the Middle East? This question implicitly underscores the contested history of the Middle East and its lands, proposes an important inquiry for anyone who wishes to understand the state of world Christianity, and reflects the authors' Anglo-American Protestant orientation (despite years of missionary work throughout the Middle East). This insightful volume opens with two essays that acclimate unfamiliar (i.e., "Western") readers to the topic, offers a meditation on the ecumenical potential that exists between Christian churches throughout the Middle East, and provides a helpful time line that displays Christianity's presence in the Holy Land(s). *Who are the Christians in the Middle East?* opens with essays by David Kerr (University of Edinburgh) and Riad Jarjour (pastor, former general secretary of Middle East Council of Churches, and member of Arab Group for Christian-Muslim Dialogue)

Kerr's opening essay, "A Western Christian Appreciation of Eastern Christianity," explores the ways in which Eastern churches have informed the sum and substance of global Christianity. Noting its connection to the narrative of the New Testament, to the event of Pentecost, to displays of liturgy and Christian tradition, to missionary work, and to religious pluralism, Kerr offers a very appreciative account of non-Western Christianity. In the end Kerr finds that Eastern expressions of Christianity "embody the spirit of Christianity...are loyal to [the] apostolic faith...bring new life to the cultures of [its] people...radiate the gospel in seemingly hopeless political situations that inflict suffering on many...nurture the Kingdom of God in community with Muslims and Jews...[a]nd remind this writer of why he aspires to be Christian" (11).

"The Future of Christians in the Arab World," by Jarjour, displays a different perspective and speculates on the future of Christianity in the Middle East. Jarjour's honest assessment includes the political reality of what he terms a "structure of endemic crisis" (13), demographic shifts, use of religion as politics, and neocolonial, neoimperialistic Western Christian mission incursion. Jarjour then surveys the responses to these crises: resigned defeat; combative solidarity; and lived tension. Jarjour prescriptively explores ways for Middle Eastern Christians to live lives of "dignity and freedom" (18), championing renewal movements; interfaith dialogue (manifest in Muslim-Christian encounter); and the pursuit of ethnic solidarity.

The bulk of "*Who are the Christians in the Middle East?*" profiles the major churches and denominations throughout the Middle East. Helpfully divided into sections on the Roman Catholic Church, the Assyrian Church of the East, the Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant bodies of faith, the authors offer a brief history of

the churches in the region and provide relevant information about church officers, web sites, and other avenues of contact. This section reads more like a handbook of churches, as brief historical snippets precede names of churches, pastors, patriarchs, bishops, and other church leaders.

Importantly, this section covers several bodies of faith of interest to readers of *JAAS*. A short section on the Chaldean Catholic Church of Babylon describes the travels of John of Montecorvino and his encounter with the patriarch Yabalaha III (the authors note that the Chaldean Church did not appear until the 1500s), notes later the ordination of Simon VIII of the Chaldeans (1500s), and recounts, among other persecutions, the Chaldean [Assyrian] massacre during WWI while documenting the church's explosive growth during the 1940s. The authors subsequently describe the patriarch's presence in Baghdad since 1950 and the presence of Chaldean Christians through the Middle East. Notably, reference is made to the ancient Eastern Syriac liturgy still used today and the commendable service carried out by the Chaldean Sisters of Mary Immaculate. Another section chronicles the history of the Synod of the Evangelical Church of Iran with nineteenth-century missionary roots and Presbyterian expressions of faith. "In 1855," the authors note, "some of the Iranian Christians who were touched by the evangelical spirituality and witness left the Nestorian church, and seven Protestant congregations were organized in the region of Rezaiyeh [Urmia] in Northwest Iran" (117). Other observations include the synodal reorganization in 1971, the Assyrian majority (55%) under the new auspices, and the cessation of "official" missionary work following the revolution of 1979. Finally, the authors devote four pages to the Assyrian Church of the East, describing this body of faith as "one of the oldest Christian communities" (130) dating to with "witness" of Thomas the Apostle, noting its Nestorian heritage, its large geographical reach (to places like India, Tibet, and even Mongolia), the persecution under Islamic leader Tamerlane, and more recent periods of intense persecution. The authors also detail the collaborative ecumenical work of the 1990s between Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV and the late Pope John Paul as well as the unique liturgical practices rooted in ancient Assyrian traditions.

All in all, "*Who Are the Christians in the Middle East?*" provides a readable and helpful introduction to expressions of Christianity in places largely unfamiliar to Anglo Protestant Christians. Historians would probably quibble, however, with the authors' inclusion of Egypt and Sudan in a book about Middle Eastern Christianity. While both of these countries have been largely influenced by Arab culture, situating these countries in the Middle East minimizes the *African* context of these countries. Unfortunately, this obscures the rich indigenous expressions of Christianity found in these places, especially in Sudan. These criticisms aside, the opening essays engagingly orient readers to the discussions at hand, and even provide ways for Middle Eastern Christians to better understand why and how some Anglo-American Protestant Christians express interest in Christian expressions of faith in non-Western contexts. Commendably, this handy

volume devotes sustained attention to issues relevant to Assyrian Christians. Above all, the work of Betty Jane and J. Martin Bailey serves to locate Middle Eastern Christianity in today's global context.

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