

Ronald Roberson, *The Eastern Christian Churches: A Brief Survey*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2004, pages 316.

In the East, many Christian churches have emerged according to their cultural, political, social, and economic background. This book is basically a survey of the Eastern Churches and the causes for the emergence of the churches. It has four parts in which the author classifies the churches according to the nature of their communion. Those who are interested in ecumenical movements can locate a lot of information about the churches in this volume.

In the first part of the book, the author discusses the Assyrian Church of the East. This church is considered to be multi-ethnic, as the Assyrian people played a central role in the ecclesial life which is developed depending upon the cultures of the country. This church, however, is not in communion with any other church in the East. The second part deals with the Oriental Orthodox Churches which are in full communion with each

other. These churches, however, are independent and are based on their cultures. These churches rejected the Christological definition of the Council of Chalcedon. There are six main Oriental Orthodox Churches. The third part discusses about the Orthodox Churches, which are in communion with the national or regional churches; they consider the Patriarch of Constantinople as the leader and symbol of their unity. The author divides the Orthodox Churches into autocephalous, autonomous, canonical churches under Constantinople, and churches of irregular status. The Patriarch of Constantinople is hailed as the Ecumenical Patriarch, as he is the unifying factor among them. In the fourth part, the author gives information about the Catholic Eastern Churches, which are in full communion with Rome. There are many orthodox churches which have converted into the communion with Rome after a lot of discussion between them and Roman Catholic Church. Even if these churches are in full communion with Rome, they are independent and they have their own geographical existence.

One of the main features of this book is the long appendix. There are two appendices in which two of author's articles which explain the causes for the rift between the Catholic Church and other churches. The author gives a clear evaluation of the historical background of the problems, the dialogue between the churches for a better relationship, and the visits of popes and the oriental orthodox hierarchies.

Another feature of this book is the fact that the author has collected data of the churches from their official websites. This book enlists information pertaining to the location, head, title of the church, residence of the head, membership, and the official website. It gives a brief history and the geographical areas where a particular church is predominantly present. This may satisfy a reader who is in search of the history of churches. The membership details of these churches may not be accurate as many people who are living outside the geographical area of the church may not be included.

We see that the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church have been in discussion over their theological differences; the author gives scientific description about the reasons that there does not emerge any immediate agreement. Although this book has a long bibliography, which is mostly pertaining to the appendices, the main discussion of the book chiefly relies on the websites, which I consider to be a drawback in the arena of scientific research. The author, however, has undertaken enormous hard

work in completing this survey, which makes it a valuable asset in understanding various churches.

Joby Joseph