

Christianity in South and Central Asia, Kenneth R. Ross, Daniel Jeyaraj and Todd M. Johnson (eds.) [Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity] (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019)

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It is generally delightful reading collaborative and multi-authored volumes. *Christianity in South and Central Asia* was no exception as it achieves for me what some of the best research monographs fail to do; it offers new and deeper insights into Christianity in South and Central Asia in a highly accessible form. I expected its papers to be variegated simply because they have been written by insiders from a diverse context as highlighted by the demographic expanse it covers but it was reassuring to also find the majority of its papers being credibly rooted both in research and professional practice. Unlike the dictionary or encyclopaedia entries, its papers actually serve as distinct chapters organised carefully under themes and are sufficiently detailed to do justice to the topic at hand without boring the reader with irrelevance. The volume actually reads like a coherent resource that could be read as a 'monograph' from cover to cover. It constitutes volume number 3 of a series of 10 being edited by Kenneth R. Ross and Todd M. Johnson.

Christianity in South and Central Asia consistently maintains an acceptable standard of research and writing by the following means: i. a careful and intentional selection of authors (many of whom I know) who bring both their academic knowledge and professional experience to offer more than a mere survey of the state of Christianity in their country or region. ii. a comprehensive coverage of each country in the selected regions and an exceptionally expansive space for India, given its subcontinental character and size (North, West, South and North-East). iii. a broader and overarching demographic mapping of Christianity leading into the specific analyses along the axes of countries, major Christian traditions (Catholics; Orthodox; United and Uniting churches; Protestants and Anglicans; Independents; Evangelicals; Pentecostals and Charismatics) and key themes (faith and culture; worship and spirituality, theology, social and political context; mission and evangelism; gender; religious freedom; inter-religious relation; diaspora; caste and tribal identity). This sort of internal nuancing of the discourse on Christianity in the selected regions makes it potentially more interesting and insightful as a resource for its readers.

Its comparison with two relatively recent resources might further highlight my positive review. The first is Roger Hedlund's *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of South Asian Christianity* - a fairly comprehensive encyclopaedia of Christianity in the region and global South Asian diaspora. Clearly, in choosing over four hundred and fifty contributors, 'major denominations and sects' and 'events, people, institutions, concepts, theological issues, churches, denominations, historical developments, and contemporary themes', its purpose was to be a dictionary for reference. I hope however that the perceptive reader will use Roger's work in combination with *Christianity in South and Central Asia* for greater depth in country-wise, thematic, and tradition specific analyses offered here along with the useful demographic information. The second is Peter Phan's *Christianities in Asia* which does offer a peek into the growth of Christianity in South Asia and the Middle East; but, its focus seems to be more on South East Asia than South (and Central) Asia. The comparison, however, is interesting for another reason. Arguably, the underlying suggestion here seems to be that the history and development of Christianity across the world and especially in Asia offers one a view of a faith that has led to unique diversities and hybridity which perhaps better lend themselves to the use of the term 'Christianities' in place of 'Christianity'. Clearly, whilst this is a reasonable position especially if one is sociologically examining the realities on the ground, in the intra-Christian discourse, there already exist widely accepted theological categories of translation, contextualisation, enculturation etc. both for describing and analysing the supposed discontinuities and continuities. It is clear that

behind the shades there exists the underlying unity in Christ which, for the insiders, transcends all particularities.

In my view, the significance of *Christianity in South and Central Asia* rests both in offering a deeply nuanced perspective of Christianity in context but also by making a start in the direction of reimagining Christianity's future in Asia (indeed there is a separate chapter in the volume on the topic which could have been developed into another major section – perhaps a task reserved for a future update). As the supposed 'Asian century' unfolds, and the countries in South and Central Asia increasingly embrace the reality of their being 'sovereign' and 'modern' states subscribing dominantly to Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, in order to flourish here as a minority, Christianity will need to enhance its capacity to translate and adapt to the uniquely local shades and yet remain identifiably distinct in exhibiting continuities with Christianity elsewhere.