The Contributions of Ancient Christian Communities to the Contemporary Middle East

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At a moment when Middle Eastern Christian communities face growing threats to their survival, particularly in Iraq and Syria, distinguished scholar of Middle Eastern Christianity, Anthony O'Mahony, analyzes the singular contributions of ancient Christian communities to the region. Based on years of first-hand research, O'Mahony argues that the world has failed to appreciate that the loss of these communities would forever change both the Middle East and Christianity. Christianity has its origins in the Middle East and remains an indigenous and integral part of the region. Its rich ecclesial context includes Latin, Oriental Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, “Assyrian” Church of the East, Oriental and Eastern Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant expressions. Between the 8th and 11th centuries, about half the world’s Christians lived in the Middle East; that figure today is barely 1%. Syria remains the last bastion of Eastern Orthodoxy in the region, and its future is precarious. At the same time, O'Mahony objects to the conventional characterization of the Middle East as “the Muslim world” because doing so automatically renders ancient Christian communities alien. Ironically, the Christian population is growing in the Gulf states and Saudi Arabia, where millions of guest workers are Christians, though they are prevented from practicing their faith openly.