Book Review: Christianity in India: The Anti-Colonial Turn. By Clara A. B. Joseph

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shifts the focus from the European gaze and the world behind to the world of the people viewed, and practices observed have a life of their own to evoke perceptions, however flawed the latter were. As an interpreter, Schouten seeks to explain the (mis)perceptions the encounters between these two worlds had generated.

Not only is Schouten’s view of interreligious dialogue and its precursors broad so as to include the coincidental encounters with scant respect for the other but so is his view of Hinduism. The practices observed by the European visitors and discussed in the volume cover those of different segments of Indian society from the 13th to the 19th centuries, both at the margins and centers. They were drawn from visits to various regions of the Indian subcontinent and belong to multiple religious traditions, broadly categorized as Hinduism. Even while concurring that these practices reflect and in part reveal the social stratification in Indian society, and that Hinduism is a broad category inclusive of several loosely aligned religious traditions, such a sweeping inclusion might transgress the integrity of the religiosities of the communities, such as Dalits at the social margins who refuse to be identified with Hinduism.

With a broad repertoire of reports and helpful interpretations, any scholar interested in studying religions in India in general or customs in different regions of the subcontinent would find this volume helpful in their research, whether their focus is on the 16th century Vijayanagar Empire or 18th century Bengal. Those of us seeking to understand the changes and continuities in social customs would find this a rich resource, as would those studying the encounters between two or more religious worlds, especially in terms of understanding how one world shapes the perceptions about the other and the processes involved. Both the writer and translator ought to be commended for the accessibility of the language. Illustrations and the glossary of terms further help the reader seeking to understand the European visitor and the Hinduism they encountered.

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The concept of ‘pet fish’ is popularly used in the philosophy of concepts literature to argue that language is not compositional. In other words, the concept of ‘pet’ and ‘fish’ together, does not correctly predict the image that the term brings to our mind. This is so because a goldfish is considered a poor example of a pet (dog or cat would be better), and a poor example of a fish (tuna or salmon would be better). The same cannot be said of Indian Christianity, that is, it is not the case that Indian Christianity is a poor example of something “Indian” (Hinduism or Buddhism would have been better) or something “Christian” (Greek
or Latin would have been better). Clara A.B. Joseph’s project adamantly demands that Indian Christianity be recognized as it is; as both Indian and Christian.

*Christianity in India* joins the small but emergent section of South Asian Christian scholarship that deals with Syrian Christians or Thomas Christians in India. The most recent of such books is Sonja Thomas’ *Privileged Minorities* (University of Washington Press, 2018). Joseph’s work challenges popular conceptions, inside and outside of the academy, as it stresses repeatedly that Indian Christianity is not a colonial import and, more strongly, that the response and resistance of Indian Christians to Portuguese colonialism can be characterized as anti-colonial. I think this project proves successful as it manages to challenge ideas of the relationship between Christianity and colonialism using the study of the Thomas Christian community.

In *Christianity in India*, Joseph’s project examines certain presumptions regarding Christians in India, namely, “that Christianity is Western, that it is colonial, and that Christians in the East are unfortunate leftovers of European colonialism” (2). Joseph inspects these presumptions to bring to light how “communities of Indian Christians, in fact, predetermined Western expansionist goals and defined the Western colonial and Indian national imaginary” (2). Joseph boldly challenges the work of scholars in India as well as the West who simply equate Christianity to the West and colonialism. She problematizes the relationship by analyzing three texts relating them to the pre-colonial Thomas Christian community from Kerala in South India. Joseph draws from texts from the medieval period that pertain to the legend of Prester John, the Christian king of India and then proceeds by reading closely Henry E.J. Stanley’s translation of *The Three Voyages of Vasco De Gama, and His Viceroyalty* and *The Journada*, a Portuguese travelogue of the Archbishop of Goa, Alexis de Menezes, to support her thesis about the misleading presumptions about Indian Christianity.

In Ch.1, Joseph establishes the relevance of taking as a case study the history of the Thomas Christian community. Thomas Christians are a precolonial Christian community in Kerala who hold firmly the conviction that the apostle Thomas, also known as Thomas the doubter, came by sea to the coast of Cranganore in Kerala and converted Hindu families to Christianity (7). Joseph argues that the Thomas Christian community is a case in point that captures uniquely a pre-colonial Christian community that repeatedly resists Portuguese colonial powers. In doing this, Joseph juxtaposes the two Christian communities, Thomas Christians and Portuguese, to examine the mechanics of colonialism at play and thereby separate Christianity from colonialism.

In Ch.2, Joseph examines the relationship between imagination and conquest, more specifically the pre-colonial imagination of India and its relationship with Portuguese colonization. The author argues that the mythical figure of Prester John, the Indian Christian king, was central to the Western imagination of India (26). Joseph notes that “the figure of Prester John offered the west the hope of linking up with a Christian India...the West’s search for similarities in the East in the medieval and early modern periods” (33). Here, Joseph draws attention to the figure called Archdeacon of All India suggesting that he possibly invokes the figure of Prester John (46).
In Ch.3, Joseph focuses on the conceptualization of Indian Christians in their everyday affairs with the Portuguese. Here Joseph analyses the travelogues of Vasco De Gama and Pedro Alves Cabral to argue that Portuguese colonization was marked by their military character as opposed to their Christian identity. Joseph notes that previous literature on the subject has “exaggerated the importance of Christianity for colonialism” (88).

In Ch.4, which I think is the heart of the project, Joseph critically examines *The Journada*, the travelogue of the Archbishop of Goa, Alexis de Menezes. Joseph complicates accusations of heresy and error levelled against Thomas Christians while situating the debate within the context of Portuguese trade interests and the Malabar Muslims who were considered rivals (150). Joseph claims that a close reading of the travelogue shows “the aspirations of the Padroado (Portuguese Church) as clearly colonial ...” (101). In the final chapter, Joseph concludes the project by arguing that a close reading of *The Journada* and other texts suggest that the Thomas Christian community “found themselves colonized and responded as occupied people would...” (165), and this response can be characterized as anti-colonial.

In summary, Joseph undertakes the painstaking task of carefully delineating, using existing primary sources, Thomas Christian responses to Portuguese colonialism. This is a deeply enriching project. She skillfully handles the primary readings and intersperses them with insightful responses from Thomas Christian Church historians like Mathias Mundadan and Placid Podipara. My only critique is that while Joseph argues that Indian Christians have been written off as either a colonial import or non-Indians from Syria (72), the specific Indian character of Indian Christianity is not developed beyond its anticolonial responses. That is, the indigenization of Eastern Christianity in Hindu South India and its relationship with local Hindu castes and rites is not addressed. However, this project provides a robust foundation for future studies towards the development of the Indian- ness of Indian Christianity, especially its Indian character in the context of Hindu South India, which is its proper milieu. The creative juxtaposition of Christians, Portuguese and Indians in colonial South India provides fresh insight and is a significant contribution to South Asian studies, World Christianity, and postcolonial studies.

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This richly detailed and meticulously researched study brings to life the early Jesuit encounter (late 16th and early 17th century) with the Thomas Christians of South India. In