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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
1553, following a schism in the Church of the East, the Thomas Christians found themselves within the Roman Catholic fold. However, as Mecherry recounts, despite their formal union with Rome, the Thomas Christians sought to maintain their traditions, which enjoyed a rich history and had been reinforced for more than a millennium through the successive presence in India of patriarchs of the Church of the East. Among these age-old traditions were the use of Syriac as a liturgical language, marriage among the priesthood, and several non-Latinate practices associated with the rites of Communion.

At the heart of Mecherry’s study is the important question of how the Thomas Christians could be induced to leave aside these practices and adopt those favored by Rome. Given that the Inquisition was established in Goa in 1560, one can easily imagine a fairly straightforward, if not severe path to this goal. As Mecherry recounts, this path was not left untrodden; accordingly, excommunications and the burning alive of those who sought to assert the authority of the East over the Thomas Christian community were not uncommon (280-2). While this brutal history is not ignored by Mecherry, it stands as background rather than foreground to Mecherry’s exploration of the Jesuits’ “accommodationist” approach to the Thomas Christians. This approach came to fruition under the influence of the often-overlooked figure of Francisco Ros SJ, who spent forty years in India (1584-1624), and eventually rose to prominence as the first Latin Archbishop of Angamaly-Cranganore, the See of the Thomas Christians. Although an accommodationist approach was not unknown to Ros’s Jesuit contemporaries, Ros’s methodology differed in its focus on inclusion. As Mecherry argues, Ros’s approach would set a standard informing Jesuit practices in India for decades and deeply influence Jesuit mission policy worldwide.

Mecherry describes his study as a “micro-history,” a term which he notes does not have a formal definition, but has been used to capture histories that favor individual voices over monolithic generalizations (xliii-iv). Although Mecherry engages a narrow chronological period (1542-1624), as revealed in this study, it is a period of great complexity, involving contending political powers and religious authorities in Europe and in India, extrinsic and intrinsic missionary rivalries, and a persistent clash of cultures that arose as Europe sought to assert its hold in India. Mecherry unravels these strands in five highly-detailed, chronologically organized chapters. Supporting Mecherry’s narrative is an extensive scholarly apparatus, with more than a thousand footnotes, a bibliography listing several hundred primary and secondary sources, and a half-dozen short appendices with images of original documents. At the heart of Mecherry’s discussion is the figure of Francisco Ros SJ, whose policy and practice of accommodation was largely of his own devising. In brief, whereas for the Jesuit missionaries who preceded Ros in India “accommodation” meant merely a nominal acceptance of the traditions they encountered (49-50), Ros’s program sought to fully engage and, as far as possible, maintain them. As Mecherry observes, this approach recalled the Pauline understanding of mission, which “called on missionaries to embrace accommodation, to the satisfaction of everyone,” and, in so doing, sought “to appropriate the apparent barriers in a mission
and employ them as tools that facilitate conversion” (373-4).

In setting the stage for Ros’s work in India, Mecherry recounts the political maneuvering that had come to dominate relations between Rome, the Catholic hierarchy in India, and the Thomas Christians (Ch. 1). Much of this maneuvering centered on the somewhat enigmatic figure of Mar Abraham, the last of the bishops sent from the Church of the East to the Thomas Christians. Although Mar Abraham had received papal approval for his bishopric (following a confession of faith), the Catholic hierarchy in India viewed him with suspicion, correctly mistrusting his commitment to Latinization. Ros’s initial involvement with the controversies surrounding Mar Abraham and the Thomas Christians show him on the side of those who opposed the continued use of the age-old traditions of the Church of the East (Ch. 2). Indeed, Ros became a student of the Syriac language (becoming the Jesuits’ most accomplished student of the language) to expose the errors of the Syriac texts maintained by the Thomas Christians. Over time, however, his reading of the Syriac texts along with his engagement with the customs of the Thomas Christians led Ros to a “certain spirit of openness” (180) and to eventually stand as a defender of the community (Ch. 3).

As Mecherry makes clear, Ros’s program was at all times a careful balancing act: “Accordingly in certain circumstances he stood with the Thomas Christians with whom he worked, but at the same time, he attempted to accommodate on their behalf the aspects of the Latin rite as well as their own…” (227). Along with the factional disputes that plagued the Church at this time, Ros’s work with the Thomas Christian community was deeply affected by political matters; the Thomas Christian community was well-placed in South India, with many of its members in prominent roles as soldiers and as traders. Ros’s leadership of the community thus had significant political ramifications for the contending Indian kingdoms as well as for the Portuguese who sought alliances with them (Ch. 4).

In the concluding chapter, Mecherry turns to the question of Ros’s influence on the famed Jesuit mission to India that followed him, that of his younger contemporary, Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656). Just as Ros had done before him, Nobili entered into a thorough-going engagement with the languages and customs of those he sought to convert. In this case, however, the subject-community he engages was not that of co-religionists, but were the Brahmmins of Madurai. Nevertheless, as Mecherry shows, the path of accommodation Ros established in his work with the Thomas Christians is clearly visible in Nobili’s mission. Indeed, Ros himself was known to have been a tireless supporter of Nobili (whose work in India, not unlike Ros’s, engendered significant opposition from his contemporaries), giving his *imprimatur* to Nobili’s treatise on the language and customs of the Brahmmins, and declaring the information presented in it to be the surest path to their conversion (392). Here the value of extending the accommodationist methodology from reforming those already in the faith (the Thomas Christians) to fully outside it (the Brahmmins of Madurai) cannot be overemphasized.

This deeply engaging volume is highly recommended for anyone with an interest in the history of the Jesuits in India, contributing not only to our understanding of the early Jesuit missionary program under Francisco Ros,
but also to its development under the well-known figure of Roberto de Nobili. Although Mecherry’s work, as a “micro-history,” centers on the figure of Ros, and the development of his accommodationist policies, there is much to be gleaned from it for those with broad interests in the sixteenth-century encounter of Europe and India, both political and religious.

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In Songs as Locus for a Lay Theology, Philip K. Mathai investigates the theological motifs and statements embedded in the hymns of two renowned Christian Malayalam hymnists, namely Moshe Walsalam Sastriyar and Sadhu Kochukunju Upadeshi from the present state of Kerala, South India. Mathai argues that the hymns that are analyzed in the book are still widely used and popular among the Malayalam-speaking Christians, both in Kerala and in diaspora, and have shaped and still reflect the Christian theology and spirituality of Malayalee Christians. The foremost contribution of this book is that the two hitherto lesser-known Indian lay theologians and musicians are introduced to western readers, along with the ethno-musical tradition they have crafted. The theological expressions and themes embedded and latent in their hymns are particularly examined. This work also provides insights into the Christian experience in the southern part of India, not simply as an extension of western Christianity during the colonial era but as Christianity was appropriated and lived by an Indian community in their particular cultural situation.

Chapter 1, “Socio-cultural and Religious Contexts of Travancore during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” traces the religious, cultural and political context of these two hymnists that shaped the content and theology of their hymns. Pointing to the fact that Malayalam is the youngest of the South Indian Dravidian languages, Mathai maintains that these two hymnists were greatly influenced and shaped by the Tamil culture and by Tamil religious practices and piety, especially the Bhakti tradition represented by Alwars of Vaishnavism and Nayanars of Shaivism. He adds that the Hindu Bhakti tradition’s stress on trusting and serving a personal God has facilitated the hymnist’s understanding of the Christian Triune God; Christ and his work; sin; salvation; and the Christian life.

While Mathai is to be commended for his investigation of Hindu Bhakti traditions, he unfortunately does not bring to light the theology introduced by the western missionaries. Clarifying the missionaries’ theology would have assisted the readers of this volume in evaluating this theology and its appropriation by the Malayalam-speaking