Francis X. Clooney S.J.

Western Jesuit Scholars in India: Tracing Their Paths, Reassessing Their Goals. Jesuit Studies: Modernity through the Prism of Jesuit History, 28. Leiden: Brill, 2020. Pp. xviii + 288. Hb, \$134.00.

Western Jesuit Scholars in India is an eminently readable critical survey of four centuries of Jesuit scholarship in India. The Jesuit mission in India was inaugurated by Francis Xavier (1506–52) who arrived in Goa in the year 1542, followed by a long line of Jesuits who made significant contributions to literary, scientific, and religious scholarship in the region. Their role in developing a religious vocabulary for Christianity in South Asia is perhaps one of the most important achievements of the order in the region. This volume is a collection of fifteen essays on Jesuit theology drawn from three decades of Francis X. Clooney's scholarship on Jesuits in India and classical Hinduism. The essays are arranged chronologically and provide critical insight into some key Jesuit texts composed between the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries in India. Considering the fact that it is a compilation of research conducted at various times in the last thirty years, the chapters display remarkable flow and thematic unity.

Critical analysis of primary texts from the Catholic and Hindu traditions, reassessing the narrative surrounding Roberto de Nobili (1577–1656) and later Jesuits, and inter-religious learning are some of the major concerns of this work. The complex relationship between the scholarship of the Jesuits and their missionary goals is another thread that runs throughout the work (179). The author makes a strong case for “reading more diversely” and “reading more wisely” in the context of Indian Jesuit theology (81). The essays in this volume highlight key moments of encounter between European Jesuits and Indian religions and sacred texts, and Jesuit attempts to insert Christianity into the framework of Indian religious thought. The approach adopted by the author in these essays is a close reading of primary texts composed by Jesuits, bringing fresh perspective and reassessing the missionary intentions and theological interpretations of Jesuits in India.

The chapters are a retrospective and introspective look at Jesuit scholarly practices. The first eight chapters study varied aspects of de Nobili's compositions on Christianity in the Madurai mission in South India. De Nobili emerges as one of the more important figures in this volume. His famous methods of accommodation in dress and lifestyle to make Christianity acceptable to the Brahmins of South India is studied with some attention by the author. De Nobili's accommodation included both a physical transformation into the

appearance of a Tamil ascetic as well as the study and use of Indian religious texts in shaping Catholic doctrines for converts.

Clooney attempts to dispel the accusation that de Nobili's dressing of Christianity in Indian garb was merely superficial. In the first chapter, "Christ as the Divine Guru in the Theology of Roberto de Nobili," he argues that de Nobili had internalized Indian scriptures and that his "Indian experience *did* color his understanding of the Christian faith itself" (20). One example of this is that Christ was presented as the "divine guru" who would teach, heal, and lead to salvation. The idea of guru used by de Nobili to present Christ to the Brahmins was an indication that he had understood the complexity of the figure of the Guru within *śaivism*, and made a conscious choice to present Christ as a divine guru.

The sixth chapter is a discussion of de Nobili's interpretation of caste in Indian society. Clooney undertakes a close reading of *Tuṣana Tikkāram* (Refutation of calumnies) to analyse the distinction between Indian religion, morality, and caste, as proposed by de Nobili (107). This distinction allowed de Nobili to accept caste while refuting the religion of the region. It is necessary to note here that caste is one of the predominant problems of the church in India and the question remains as to how far de Nobili's acceptance of caste, however well-reasoned, contributed to the building of a church where caste is still seen and practised.

The author presents de Nobili as a "theological innovator" (32). In addition, he is firmly established as a pioneer of Indian Catholic theology and inculturation, much before the term appeared in the church's official vocabulary. Clooney argues that de Nobili's apologetics based on a systematic study of Indian texts laid the foundation of comparative theology and the more "scientific" Indology that emerged in the nineteenth century (143). In spite of the significant space commanded by de Nobili in this volume, Clooney strives to avoid idealization of de Nobili's theology and is willing to study the significance of his methods while noting its flaws.

The first eight chapters deal with numerous other nuances of de Nobili's scholarship: his careful reading of Indian texts such as the *Taittirīya Upanishad*, his composition of theological works in order to create a Christianity grounded in the Indian framework of sacredness, as well as his clear understanding of classical Indian texts coupled with "partial readings" and a "refusal to understand in order to convert" (126).

The meticulous discussions on the writings of lesser known Jesuits and "responsible attention to historical figures" is one of the strengths of this volume (182). Chapters Nine to Thirteen deal with the scholarly works of Jesuits who worked in the region after de Nobili, namely Jean Venance Bouchet

(1655–1732), Joseph Bertrand (1801–84), William Wallace (1863–1922), and the theology of the Indian Catholic Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861–1907), along with an essay on the Jesuit refutation of the concept of rebirth. The issue of caste re-emerges in the essay on Joseph Bertrand, S.J., wherein Clooney studies the interpretation of caste by nineteenth-century Jesuits such as Bertrand in the light of social progress and national identity (216).

The final two essays differ in tone from the biographical and historical nature of the preceding chapters and may be read as an analysis of Ignatian spirituality and an aspiration towards a more sustained commitment to Jesuit-Hindu studies.

There are, however, some Jesuits who seem to be missing from the discussions in this volume: Henrique Henriques (1520–1600), Thomas Stephens (1549–1619), John de Britto (1647–93), and Constanzo Giuseppe Beschi (1680–1747), to name a few. While these Jesuits are mentioned by Clooney, a reading of their works would have added weight to the arguments of this volume. The literary and linguistic genius of Jesuits such as Beschi and Stephens and their contributions to inculturation in the early missions remain unexplored here.

Despite these absences, the strength of this work is Clooney's careful reading of the primary texts and a genuine commitment to reassessing the methods adopted by early Jesuits in India. This work will be a valuable resource for scholars of religious studies, South Asian literature, translation and intercultural studies, Catholic theology, and to those interested in the history of the Catholic Church in India. The arguments in this volume are supported by a vast network of primary texts that are now available as a result of Clooney's scholarship. The author's understanding of Hinduism and its texts and his commitment to interreligious study is clearly visible in these lucidly written chapters, which engage complex cultural and theological questions pertaining to the Catholic Church in India.

Annie Rachel Royson

Pandit Deendayal Petroleum University, Literature, School of Liberal Studies,
Gandhinagar, India

annie.royson@sls.pdpu.ac.in

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