Antony Mecherry, S.J.

Testing Ground for Jesuit Accommodation in Early Modern India: Francisco Ros SJ in Malabar (16th–17th Centuries). Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu (IHSI), 2019. Pp. 1 + 494. Hb, €60.00.

This is a fascinating book on a Spanish Jesuit who worked single-mindedly in the Indian province of the Society of Jesus in order to bring the Thomas Christians, as they were known, into communion with the Latin rite of the Catholic Church. The time is the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in South India. These Christians had had a centuries-long relationship with the Nestorian church in Babylon and had adopted their East Syrian rite and language for their own worship.

Antony Mecherry writes that his book “is an attempt to comprehend, at a micro level, the complex dynamics that worked behind the process of accommodation and adaptation that Archbishop Ros and Roberto de Nobili wanted to launch in South India” (437). One can state at the outset that the author’s project has been a great success.

In the process of his delving into this subject, we are fortunate to see the workings of a number of Jesuits and of other religious towards the project of accommodation that Francisco Ros (1559–1624) initiated and carried through. He did not come with any preplanned methodology yet in the process of working it out, had a great influence on the Italian, Roberto de Nobili (1557–1656) and his work in the Madurai mission.

Ros started off his work after his appointment as the first Latin bishop of Angamaly. His process of winning over the Thomas Christians known as “accommodation” focused more on seeing cultural similarities and compatibilities than on religious differences between them and members of the Roman Latin rite. His forty years stay in the mission led him to advocate to his fellow Jesuits a participatory involvement in the customs and languages of the mission.

The well-documented five chapters of the book show the growth of Ros as he drew from the inspiration of Francis Xavier and of the Jesuit visitor, Alessandro Valignano but who went on to develop his own method of accommodation. With his painstaking learning of Syriac and Malayalam, he won over the Thomas Christians with his amiable ways (*il modo soave*) and involved himself in their ecclesial, cultural, and social life.

Chapter one shows the differing perspectives of Jesuits towards the Malabar mission. Most viewed the sole purpose to be the bringing of the Thomas Christians back into the practice of the Latin rite church. A stumbling block to

this project was the presence of the archdeacon Mar Abraham, who at various times was seen by the Jesuits as a heretic or an untrustworthy person while being the bishop of the Chaldean church in India. There were attempts to have the Inquisition discipline his church or have him declare publicly that he was in fact not a bishop. After the first synod of Angamaly, Valignano portrayed the archdeacon as unreliable. He stressed that the coming of the Thomas Christians into full union with the Roman Church was of crucial importance in determining the fate of the Portuguese in India linked as that was with the pepper trade in Malabar.

We see the growth of Francisco Ros as a missionary in chapter two, of one who within years of his arrival in Malabar had earned the trust of the people by his winning ways of being interested in the customs of their church. He did deal with some doctrinal issues and wrote a treatise entitled "*De erroribus Nestorianorum*" meant to show Mar Abraham as an agent of the Nestorian Church.

Chapter three deals with Ros and the praxis of accommodation. As the first Latin bishop of Angamaly, he had objected to the coercive methods of the Synod of Diamper and organized the Synod of Angamaly to safeguard the sentiments of the Thomas Christians. He was opposed by Archbishop Aleixo de Menezes of Goa who had a political agenda up his sleeve as well as he wanted the Portuguese civil authorities to be strong along the Malabar coast.

The following chapter discusses Ros's accommodation and the reversals in his mission strategy. Ros had to encounter opposition to his plans from Jesuit superiors and also from the next archdeacon of the Thomas Christians, George of the Cross. The latter worked at restoring the jurisdiction of the Chaldean patriarchate over the church of Angamaly. At his death, Ros was mourned as a marvelous teacher and defender of the faith. He had always dreamed of the conversion of Malabar to Christianity and had stressed the need of a new generation of Jesuits for this purpose. This was not to be and non-Jesuit missionaries capitalized on Jesuit mission weaknesses and invited Propaganda Fide to enter the mission field from 1622 onwards.

In an interesting final chapter, we read of how both Ros and de Nobili saw cultural symbols and customs in Malabar and Madurai as crucial conversion potentials. Ros viewed his mission strategy in Malabar to be on par with the Jesuit adaptation experiments in Japan and China. His intent had always been the upholding of the superiority of the Latin rite and on the reconversion of the Thomas Christians within the structure of their modes of thinking and worship.

Overall, though the accommodation model was that of Francisco Ros in its essence and intent, various missionaries worked at the same but often at cross purposes or with prejudiced viewpoints. Ros had worked with devotion to the

cause he had proposed and pushed forward. The present book has been an interesting read and worthy salute to the contribution of Francisco Ros. A few pages on the mission experiments in Goa and other parts of India by Jesuits might have helped the reader to see the various experiments being conducted in differing circumstances as one common enterprise, supported finally by the order as a whole.

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Alan Richard Sweeten

China's Old Churches: The History, Architecture, and Legacy of Catholic Sacred Structures in Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei Province. Studies in the History of Christianity in East Asia, 2. Leiden: Brill, 2020. Pp. xix + 419. Hb, €138.00 / \$166.00.

When the news of the fire that consumed the roof of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris on April 15, 2019, broke, France and the world reacted with an overwhelming outpouring of grief. It is clear that the old churches like this one was more than a religious structure; they are the keys to understanding history, architecture, and memory of a place and its people. These three major themes are the broadly defined goals of the study by the historian Alan Richard Sweeten, *China's Old Churches: The History, Architecture, and Legacy of Catholic Sacred Structures in Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei Province*.

As suggested by the title, the study is a survey of churches from these sites in northern China. Like an enthusiastic tour guide, Sweeten takes his readers on a circuitous journey to visit all the large and small churches in this part of China, meticulously recounting the histories of each. After an overview of early Catholic history in China in Chapter 2, he begins the tour with the four major churches found in the capital Beijing in Chapter 3. Originally founded by the Society of Jesus in the seventeenth to eighteenth century, these were the oldest and largest Catholic structures in China and have borne witness to some of the most significant events in modern Chinese history through their subsequent building, rebuilding, and relocation. Smaller churches in Beijing and the city's immediate vicinity are explored in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5 and 6, he moves onto Tianjin and its vicinity. Here, the timeline shifts to the nineteenth century, where the churches were built by Catholic missionaries Vincentians (Congregation of the Mission) under the protection of the French, who have