Pineapple and herring : how the Roman Catholic church adapted Protestant reform principles to create a global missionary presence

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Pineapple and Herring: How the Roman Catholic Church Adapted Protestant Reform Principles to Create a Global Missionary Presence

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Abstract

The two centuries after 1517 witnessed a historic global expansion of Christianity, a movement that has largely shaped the modern-day map of the faith worldwide. That movement, however, was largely undertaken not in obedience to Reformation principles, but in reaction to them, and by highly active Catholic missionaries and reformers. Across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, missionaries and church builders exemplified and implemented some key Reformation principles, especially in terms of the use of vernacular languages. The extraordinary commitment to the vernacular permitted Catholic Christians to operate within the otherwise closed Chinese environment, and actually to achieve a degree of cultural hegemony in Vietnam and the Tamil areas of southern India. These vernacular successes continued long after the notorious Chinese rites controversies of the early eight-

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eenth century, which notionally restrained such immersion in local cultures.

A historian knowing nothing of Christian divisions could easily make some very logical, but quite false, deductions about the Reformation era, its impact, and how naturally the sequence of events would flow. Between about 1517 and 1560, the Christian church in Europe engaged in a massive rethinking of its fundamental assumptions and beliefs, a sweeping and even revolutionary reform. Over the next 150 years or so—from the 1540s until the end of the seventeenth century—those reinvigorated Christians expanded their influence across the world, in a stupendous expansion that still shapes the map of the world's believers. Unlike any earlier political or religious empires, the new Christian world was a truly global affair, transoceanic as well as transcontinental.

The logical linkage between the two phenomena seems so natural, although the suggested connection would be quite wrong. Difficult though this might be to explain to non-Christians, there was a near-total disconnect between the heirs of the Reformers, and the expansive missions. For a quarter millennium after the Reformation, Protestant missions were strictly limited in their scope and impact. All the global successes were achieved by Catholics, who hoped to witness the extinction of what they viewed as the detestable Protestant heresy. The relative success of the two sides on the worldwide scale points dramatically to the significance of political and imperial affairs in determining the outcome of European religious conflicts.[1]

This assuredly does not mean that the Reform era had no impact on the Catholic global missions. For one thing, one factor driving the overseas missions was the need to assert the glories of the Catholic Church when it was under such vigorous assault in its home territories. More generally, the Catholic expansion was driven by very much the same impulses that inspired the Reform movement in the first place. That included new attitudes to the Bible, to vernacular languages, and to the application of critical scholarship in matters of faith. Of course, the analogies must not be drawn too far, and the question of Bible

[1] Throughout I have used R. Po-chia Hsia, ed., *Cambridge History of Christianity: Reform and Expansion, 1500–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Tara Alberts, *Conflict and Conversion: Catholicism in Southeast Asia, 1500–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

translation proved deeply divisive. Nor should we see Catholic leaders as slavishly following Protestant principles, rather than exemplifying and implementing those principles, which were part of the larger Christian culture of the time. But in different ways, and in different contexts, at least some "Reform" attitudes went far towards explaining the successes of the Catholic movement.

THE GLOBAL STAGE

Accounts of Christian history at the time of Martin Luther commonly focus on conditions in Europe, and specifically on Germany and northern Europe, although there might be a passing reference to the recent discoveries by Columbus. Missing from such a picture is the strongly globalized nature of this era with a series of events that at the time might have seemed far more significant than theological squabbles in a German university town. We might illustrate this from the decisive Battle of Diu, a naval conflict that occurred off the western coast of India in 1509. The Portuguese fleet defeated a broad alliance that included the rulers of Muslim Gujarat and Hindu Calicut, the Ottoman Empire and the Mamluk sultanate of Egypt, as well as the Christian republics of Venice and Dubrovnik. Clearly, this was a world well used to globalized power struggles, not to mention cynical alliances that transcended faith and ideology.

Such battles also had potent religious dimensions, as the Spanish and Portuguese framed their imperial expansion in strictly Christian terms: the church followed the flag. Victories like Diu laid the foundation for new Catholic settlements in southern India, which in turn became bases for the later Jesuit and Franciscan missions throughout South and East Asia. In 1510, the Portuguese established their critical Indian base at Goa, which they held until 1961.[2]

Also, in this era—during Luther's prime years, in fact—these empires first settled the lands that would become important Christian centers. The Portuguese claimed Brazil in 1500. The Spanish staked their claim to the Philippines in 1521. In 1508, the Portuguese established a historic alliance with Ethiopia, providing the weaponry and military

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[2] Roger Crowley, *Conquerors* (New York: Random House, 2015).

assistance that allowed that old Christian kingdom to survive in its struggles against powerful Muslim neighbors.

It would be convenient to cite here some critical global event in 1517 to set aside Luther's acts in Wittenberg. No obvious such event comes to mind, but 1518 offers richer pickings. In the newly conquered Spanish colony of Cuba, the governor was preparing for the invasion of Mexico. At the end of that year, he gave the command to Hernán Cortés, who began his campaign some months later. However brutal the conquest, and however cynical its motives, these acts mark the beginning of Christianization in Mexico and Central America.

The year 1518 was crucially important in another corner of the emerging Christian world. The most powerful kingdom in black Africa was the Kongo, which had accepted Christianity without European conquest. The ruler, Afonso, was a pious and learned Catholic, whose son Enrique entered the priesthood. In 1518, Enrique became a bishop, presumably the first black Catholic bishop at least since Roman times.[3]

To varying degrees, all these ventures flourished, and on an unprecedented scale. Through history, there had been various so-called "world empires," but none in fact really deserved the title. Whether Macedonian, Roman, Arab, or Mongol, each regime in its day carved out a vast territory in Eurasia, but none really achieved a global, transoceanic scale. That distinction was left to the Spanish of the Counter-Reformation, driven to span the globe by the twin motives of gold and the glory of the Catholic Church. The once-daunting Pacific now became a highway, not a barrier, and Christian missionaries led the way. If a single moment symbolizes the unification of the continents, it is the creation in 1578 of the Philippine diocese of Manila as a suffragan see of Mexico City.[4]

For a century after that date, the trade route from Manila to Acapulco represented *the* central artery of European imperial power, as Mexican silver was traded for Asian spices. The route was the world's most important axis of missionary expansion. Spanish and Portuguese Catholics seemed set fair to convert much of their new Pacific empire. Beyond the Philippines, Jesuit priests were in high regard at the Chinese

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[3] Cecile Fromont, *The Art of Conversion* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

[4] Hugh Thomas, *World without End* (New York: Random House, 2014); Robert Richmond Ellis, *They Need Nothing* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); Thomas Banchoff and José Casanova, eds., *The Jesuits and Globalization* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2016).

court and were winning converts among the ambitious warlords and aristocrats of southern Japan. When the Japanese commander Toyotomi Hideyoshi invaded Korea in the 1590s, his faithful Catholic warlord followers created the first lasting Christian presence in that peninsular.

As a result of these efforts, the Vatican now became the unquestionable pioneer of a truly global diplomacy. Under Pope Paul V (1605–21), departments handled affairs in North and South America, in Africa, and in the dazzlingly wealthy empires of East and South Asia. For a few decades, any objective assessment of the Christian world would judge its Catholic portions to be vastly more important than those irrelevant Protestants clinging stubbornly to their bare lands in Northern Europe. When the first centennial of the Reformation fell in 1617, it was difficult to dispute the global hegemony of the Roman Catholic Church. Catholic polemic vaunted such globalization, pointing out the embarrassing contrast to the paltry endeavors of their rivals. Protestants, they noted, ate herring; Catholics had pineapples, oranges, and coconut. Who could doubt which side had God's favor?[5]

It would be many years before Protestants could offer any serious challenge to this narrative. The main Protestant competitors on the global scale were the Dutch and English, but neither ventured far into missionary work among non-Christians before the end of the seventeenth century. British missions outside North America were marginal until the very end of the eighteenth century. Only in 1706 was there a significant Lutheran mission to southern India, in an area then already overrun by Catholic missions. Prior to the late eighteenth century, much Protestant writing on missions and overseas activities explains why these are not thought advisable or desirable.

That sizable difference remained true even after the Spanish Empire fell into sharp decline, and the Dutch built a mighty colonial empire in the East Indies. As early as 1619, the Dutch East India Company (the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, VOC) founded its capital at Batavia (Jakarta) and spread its influence over much of the vast territory that we today call Indonesia. The Netherlands at that time was fiercely Calvinist, but that stance was hard to observe in the eastern colonies. Evangelistic work—notionally the responsibility of the VOC—was patchy at best, and mainly involved determinedly keeping out rival Catholic missionaries. Eventually, by the start of the eight-

[5] For a wonderful sense of this world as it existed in the early seventeenth century, see Liam M. Brockey, *The Visitor* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014).

eenth century, the Bible had been translated into Malay, the regional lingua franca used by the Company in its commercial dealings. That Bible was however quite inaccessible to most local people, with their many distinctive vernaculars. If they chose not to learn Malay in order to read the Bible, that was their misfortune.

MISSION AND LANGUAGE

In many territories ruled by the Catholic powers, regimes simply imposed Christianity and suppressed rival faiths. To take one notorious instance, the near-total destruction of Mayan books and manuscripts ranks as one of the worst cultural atrocities in human history. In Asian and African territories, in contrast, missionaries and clergy were always conscious of their minority status, and of the delicate nature of their tolerated status in those lands. They absolutely had to present themselves and their faith in vernacular forms that would be acceptable to local elites. Effective, culture-sensitive evangelization was a matter of survival.[6]

Depending on the particular society, that meant finding a cultural niche into which European Catholics could insert themselves. China, above all, was hostile to any European influences until Jesuit scholars showed the usefulness of some of their skills, especially astronomy, and the famous "art of memory." Catholic missionaries to Japan became welcome and indeed sought after when they brought with them European techniques of metallurgy, and the artillery weapons that they produced.

In each case, missionaries demonstrated a deeply impressive openness to vernacular languages, to making religious ideas available in the languages of particular nations and cultures. Such an approach had been well known in Luther's time, and was favored by Erasmus. He wrote that,

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[6] Luke Clossey, *Salvation and Globalization in the Early Jesuit Missions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). John D. Early, *The Maya and Catholicism* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006).

> I totally disagree with those who are unwilling that the Sacred Scriptures, translated into the vulgar tongue, should be read by private individuals… I wish that they were translated into all languages of all people, that they might be read and known not merely by the Scots and Irish, but even by the Turks and Saracens… I wish that the ploughman might sing parts of them at his plough and the weaver at his shuttle, and that the traveler might beguile with their narration the weariness of the way.[7]

Luther wholly agreed with what became a fundamental tenet of Protestant thought. As the Anglican 39 Articles declared,

> It is a thing plainly repugnant to the word of God and the custom of the primitive Church, to have public prayer in the Church, or to minister the sacraments in a tongue not understood of the people.

Modern audiences might be skeptical about the linguistic talents claimed by and for the missionaries, especially if they know anything about the destruction of the missions in Japan, as recounted in Shusaku Endo's novel *Silence*, and the 2016 film adaptation. Certainly, some Jesuit missionaries met dreadful fates, but others were astonishingly successful, and in precisely those areas of inter-cultural contact that we might expect to have been most difficult. They were above all phenomenal linguists, and those skills made them invaluable to courts and governments around the world, even those who had little time for their religious message. In some remarkable cases, those missionaries shaped or even re-created the languages and literatures of the societies in which they operated.[8]

Alongside the martyrs of Japan, we might recall their exact Jesuit contemporary Alexandre de Rhodes (1591–1650). Born in France, he spent much of his career in the land we call Vietnam, which was then a proud imperial power, with many wealthy aristocratic families. After the collapse of the Japanese missions, the Jesuit order made Indo-China its next primary target, and de Rhodes was among the leaders of that effort. He plunged wholeheartedly into learning Vietnamese language,

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[7] The quotation is familiar, and in various forms is cited in many books on the Reformation era. See for instance Scott R. Petersen, *Where Have All the Prophets Gone?* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2005), 244.

[8] Ikuo Higashibaba, *Christianity in Early Modern Japan* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2001).

history, and culture, although run-ins with local lords repeatedly forced him into exile. Narrowly escaping a death sentence, he found himself unable to return to Vietnam. He died a little short of his seventieth year, while beginning a whole new missionary (and linguistic) career—in Persia!

But de Rhodes's contributions to the Vietnamese world were enormous, including as they did a scholarly grammar, and in 1651, a Vietnamese-Latin-Portuguese dictionary. Crucially, he helped shape the writing of the Vietnamese language as we know it today. In his time, Vietnamese was normally written in *Chú Nôm* characters, adapted from Chinese. Portuguese missionaries (mainly Jesuits themselves) had however developed a Latin alphabet, which de Rhodes used in his work and favored for purposes of popular evangelization. His example had an overwhelming influence, and that alphabet in turn developed into the *Qúoc Ngú* (national language) script that became standard under later French rule. If de Rhodes did not invent that system, it was his work above all, and especially the 1651 Dictionary, that gave it mainstream status. The twentieth century Vietnamese nationalists who accepted and promoted that Latinized script did so with full knowledge that they were using a system devised by Jesuit Fathers. Today, *Qúoc Ngú* is the nation's common and officially-sanctioned system.

De Rhodes's innovations only reached fruition long after his lifetime, but other missionaries had a much more immediate impact. Among the greatest and the most remarkable was Fr. Constanzo Beschi (1680–1742), one of the many European clergy who built up the very strong Catholic presence that still flourishes in Tamil Nadu, southern India. Although Fr. Constanzo also survived periods of persecution, he did a splendid job of framing his faith in ways that local Tamil people would find acceptable, and he dressed as a Hindu ascetic, a sannyasi. He is often known by his Tamil name, *Vīramāmunivar*.[9]

Fr. Constanzo's commitment to Tamil culture went far beyond adorning new churches with a few Orientalizing frills. He thoroughly mastered Tamil language and literature to the point of composing excellent grammars, glossaries, and lexicons, and earning the title of the "Father of Tamil Prose." In poetry, he wrote several works that Tamil scholars still count among the classics of that language, including a Christian epic called the *Thembavani* that focused on the life of St. Jo-

[9] Ines G. Zupanov, *Missionary Tropics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

seph. He also translated some of the ancient Tamil writings into Latin, making European intellectuals aware of the glories of south Indian culture.

From many other examples, we might select the astonishing career of Beschi's near contemporary Ippolito Desideri (1684–1733). Desideri, another Jesuit, was the first Westerner to master Tibetan language and culture, and to debate that country's thinkers on their own terms. Already by 1720, he was writing in literary Tibetan, and his sweeping account of Tibetan culture remains one of the greatest achievements of its kind.[10]

BUT NOT THE BIBLE

We should note here one critical difference from Protestant attitudes, and one that seems startling to modern perceptions. For all their skills and all their ambitious translation ventures, even some of the greatest missionaries did not seek to render the Bible itself into the vernacular. A full Vietnamese Bible had to wait until the end of the nineteenth century, and the fact that a Tamil Bible existed in Beschi's time was due entirely to the work of Protestant missionaries at Tranquebar.

This reluctance reflected the fundamental divisions within European Christianity at that time. Throughout the history of the Latin Church, there had been a great many approved vernacular Bible translations, and reformists in the early sixteenth century favored continuing and extending those efforts. The furor of the Reformation years had sharply polarized attitudes, and the Council of Trent looked dimly on further translation. The major reason for concern involved the spread of unauthorized translations, and the danger of uninformed or ill-intentioned readers drawing their own seditious conclusions from the text. If the work of Luther and Calvin had not raised sufficient alarms about such perils, the threat of insurgent Anabaptism certainly did.

Use of vernacular scriptures had in fact become a clear marker separating Protestants and Catholics, and it is not surprising that that

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[10] Trent Pomplun, *Jesuit on the Roof of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). Donald S. Lopez Jr. and Thupten Jinpa, *Dispelling the Darkness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

attitude extended to newer churches overseas. One early crisis came in the newly conquered Spanish lands of Mexico, where Nahuatl was a major spoken language. The Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagun began a translation of the whole Bible, beginning with the psalms and gospels, but in 1578 the effort was vetoed by the Inquisition. Although seventeenth-century Jesuits largely created the Paraguayan language of Guarani in its written form, not until the twentieth century was there a New Testament translation into that tongue. To over-simplify only slightly, the activity of the Catholic missions of these years in Bible translation is a non-story, a history of negatives.

Missionaries across the new Christian worlds were very enthusiastic about presenting Christian texts in new languages—catechisms, tracts, devotional works, lives of Christ and the saints, even selected brief portions of the Bible itself. Absent from such programs, though, was the task of full Bible translation that later Protestant missionaries would regard as the fundamental cornerstone of any future progress. It was not that such efforts were prohibited, but they were clearly given no kind of priority. Had someone protested that the priests were concealing the Bible from the people, they would have rejected such a charge. No, they would reply, all these various printed works incorporated Biblical themes and texts, which also pervaded the sermons and homilies that priests might deliver. The Bible was indeed being presented, but in properly interpreted form, mediated by trained clergy and scholars. And as the Dutch example in the East Indies shows, the mere fact of Bible translation need not of itself have produced revolutionary consequences.[11]

From a modern perspective (Protestant or Catholic), though, the reluctance to translate the Bible is all the more controversial because scholars like de Rhodes, Desideri, Beschi, and the rest clearly had the means and resources to undertake the work, in the most culture-sensitive way. If they had done the translation, the impact on Christianity in their respective Asian countries might have been immense.

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[11] Jaime Lara, *Christian Texts for Aztecs* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008); William F. Hanks, *Converting Words* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Mark Christensen, *Nahua and Maya Catholicisms* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Mark Z. Christensen, *The Teabo Manuscript: Maya Christian Copybooks, Chilam Balams, and Native Text Production in Yucatán* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2016).

THE CHINESE RITES

Even if the Bible itself was not translated, did Christian missionaries still have to face delicate issues in interpreting the words of faith? In the seventeenth century at least, Catholic missionaries were very open to such experiments. Jesuits above all were very sensitive to issues of cultural adaptation and spurned attempts to impose European values. From the first, the missionaries tried to transform Christianity into a form that would be comprehensible and relevant to the Chinese, and in this instance, that did include portions of the Bible (the Ten Commandments and selected parts of the New Testament).[12]

When such texts were translated into Chinese, that meant choosing one of several possible Chinese terms for God. In the event the sixteenth-century missionaries chose *T'ien*, a term familiar in Chinese philosophy, and usually translated as "heaven"; they addressed God as *Shang-ti*, Lord of Heaven. The Jesuits took a relaxed attitude to deep-rooted Chinese customs and practices, preferring to absorb peacefully anything not flagrantly contrary to Christian teaching. The missionaries were supported by the Vatican and its *Propaganda* office, which in 1659 asked, perceptively,

> What could be more absurd than to transport France, Spain, Italy or some other European country to China? Do not introduce all that to them but only the Faith. It is the nature of men to love and treasure above everything else their own country and that which belongs to it. In consequence, there is no stronger cause for alienation and hate than an attack on local customs, especially when these go back to a venerable antiquity.

This principle meant respecting the Chinese veneration for ancestors and the philosophy of Confucius. If European aristocrats lavished such wealth on creating sumptuous family tombs within the churches, why

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[12] For the Chinese missions, see Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Viking, 1984); Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); R. Po-chia Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

should Chinese gentlemen not pay due respects to their illustrious forebears?

The late seventeenth century was a glorious time for the Chinese missions, and in 1692, Christians earned an edict of toleration from the ruling emperor Kang Xi. The prospects were intoxicating: Kang Xi was arguably the world's most powerful sovereign at that time: he ruled perhaps 150 million subjects, a population equivalent to that of the whole of Europe, including Russia. Historically minded Catholics recalled that the conversion of the Roman Empire had also begun with such an edict of toleration from a friendly emperor. Winning many converts, the missionaries advanced Chinese clergy, and Luo Wenzao, the first Catholic bishop of Chinese origin, was consecrated in 1685. By 1700 China had around 200,000 Catholics, a small fraction of the whole, but many were well-placed politically.[13]

Even so, the Jesuit cultural compromise fell apart at the end of the seventeenth century, when the Society's enemies succeeded in turning the popes against them. Within a few years, Jesuits came under repeated attack for permitting the Chinese to worship ancestors, for canonizing Saint Confucius, and including the names of pagan gods in the translated scriptures. By 1704 the Vatican ruled decisively against the Society of Jesus, prohibiting the Chinese rites and ordering the suppression of recent Bible translations. Henceforth, religious services were to be held strictly in Latin. Worse, the papal envoys who declared the new regulations also made high claims for the political role of the Vatican, a foreign presence that could not be tolerated by the Chinese emperors. In 1724, the Chinese government responded to these accumulated insults by proscribing the Christian faith. As the Catholic Church became ostentatiously a foreign body, it invited persecution on a scale that eliminated most of the Jesuits' successes by the end of the eighteenth century.[14]

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[13] Tang Kaijian, *Setting Off from Macau* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

[14] George Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985); Andrew C. Ross, *A Vision Betrayed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994). Christopher M. S. Johns, *China and the Church* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016). Of course, the Catholic presence in China was not wholly uprooted. See for instance Henrietta Harrison, *The Missionary's Curse and Other Tales from a Chinese Catholic Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

WHICH BIBLE?

In another way too, the Catholic missionaries proved heirs to the common assumptions of the Reform era. In the early sixteenth century, European scholars applied new critical scholarship to the Bible, to its textual history, and to fundamental questions of canon. Among other things, this meant drawing a sharp distinction between texts that were fully approved and canonical, and those that would be regarded as apocryphal, deuterocanonical, or even worthy of condemnation. Through the sixteenth century, Protestant and Catholic Reformers engaged in an escalating purge of texts, excluding many writings that would have throughout the Middle Ages been regarded as wholly worthy of reading in church or liturgical contexts. Particularly hard hit were works focused on the life of the Virgin Mary, or of the saints. Ultimately, Protestants proved more draconian in consigning works to the category of apocrypha (and often excluding them altogether) but Catholics were very stringent in their way. For one thing, Catholics were all the more determined to show rigor in such matters as a means of rebutting Protestant charges about admitting false or superstitious works into the church.

The problem was that many ancient churches around the world had quite different attitudes to such marginal or apocryphal works, and saw no need to follow fashions in European critical scholarship. That clash of perceptions became acute when Catholic imperial authorities found themselves exercising power over those truly old Christian communities. One key battlefront was in southern India, where Christianity might date back to the second century. Claiming foundation by St. Thomas, the church maintained its identity through the Middle Ages. It was firmly part of the Church of the East, the so-called Nestorian Church, which looked to the Iraq-based Patriarch of Babylon.

In the sixteenth century, new Christian adventurers appeared, as Portuguese ships carved out their commercial empire in the Indian Ocean. Portuguese and Spanish Catholic clergy were intrigued but baffled by these Indian Christians, who claimed not even to have heard of the Pope in Rome. Gradually, the Europeans expanded their power over the local churches. Matters came to a head in 1599, with the synod held at Diamper (Udayamperoor, in the modern Indian state of Kerala) under Aleixo de Menezes, the Portuguese Archbishop of Goa. The synod imposed Roman authority on the local church. It demanded that

Indian believers renounce their Nestorian doctrines, as well as any customs that could not be reconciled with European Catholic standards. This particularly included Hindu-tinged customs that had crept in over the previous centuries. In a sense, the Catholics were applying doctrinal principles that would have been very familiar to Protestants, namely the purging of customs and beliefs that had accreted to a supposed primal purity.

For present purposes, the synod's most significant act was in identifying and condemning many local writings, including ancient apocryphal scriptures. Henceforward, on pain of excommunication, no person should "presume to keep, translate, read or hear read to others" any of the books listed. One was *The Infancy of our Savior* (*The History of our Lady*), which contained many ideas that had been the familiar fare of pseudo-gospels across the Christian world for centuries, including many popular ideas about the nativity and the life of the Virgin. (This book was substantially the ancient *Protevangelium*, which dates back to the mid-second century.) Now, though, they were classified as damnable errors, demanding the book's suppression and elimination. For instance, the *Infancy* asserted that

> the Annunciation of the angel was made in the Temple of Jerusalem, where Our Lady was, which contradicts the Gospel of St. Luke, which says, it was made in Nazareth; as also that Joseph had actually another wife and children when he was betrothed to the holy virgin; and that he often reproved the child Jesus for his naughty tricks; that the child Jesus went to school with the rabbis, and learned of them with a thousand other fables and blasphemies of the same nature…. that St. Joseph, to be satisfied whether the virgin had committed adultery, carried her before the priests who according to the law gave her the water of jealousy to drink; that Our Lady brought forth with pain, and parting from her company, not being able to go farther, she retired to a stable at Bethlehem.[15]

These stories are all drawn ultimately from the *Protevangelium*.

Also condemned to the fire was a whole library of Syriac spiritual and theological writings:

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[15] Scaria Zacharia, *The Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper 1599* (Edamattam, Kerala: Indian Institute of Christian Studies, 1994).

> The main object of the Synod of Diamper was to stamp out Nestorianism and enforce Roman Catholicism. With this object, a careful examination was made of all the extant writings, and those which taught the heresy of Nestorius, or spoke against the Virgin, or suggested an early rivalry between S. Peter and S. Thomas (the patron saint of the S. Indian Syrians), or were opposed in any way whatsoever to the teaching of Rome were condemned to be burnt. This was actually done at Angamale, Chinganor, and elsewhere.[16]

An area once rich with ancient Christian scriptures was largely robbed of its heritage. The Synod of Diamper "probably accounts for the poverty of the Indian Syriac literature and the absence of really old manuscripts." Incidentally, Catholic envoys were in these same years inflicting similar damage on the old Christian libraries of Syria, Mesopotamia, and Persia. This cultural catastrophe was inflicted by Christians on other Christians.

But whatever its horrors and injustices, the Diamper affair must be seen as the application of Reformation principles. Catholics were enacting in India very much what contemporary Protestants were doing in contemporary Europe, eradicating what they saw as bogus scriptures and Marian fables.

ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE

In pointing to the "Reform" qualities of the Catholic missions, I am clearly not suggesting direct borrowing or co-optation, an "Imitation of Luther." We might rather think in terms of parallel evolution, of comparable responses to similar circumstances. In practice, vernacular solutions were pursued because they were the only ones feasible under the circumstances, and when a church forbade these tactics, disaster resulted. In other ways too, Protestant and Catholic missions responded similarly to the situations they faced and debated similarly over possible solutions. Should Christians seek to separate their native converts from a pagan society, or else let them live in their old ways? If the Jesuits had their vast reservations in Paraguay—the Reductions—then

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[16] William Wright and Stanley Arthur Cook, *A Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts Preserved in the Library of the University of Cambridge* (1901).

English missionaries in the Americas likewise had their praying Indian towns.

But the nature and setting of these missions also had other effects on the clergy involved. Finding themselves amidst alien cultures and languages, they turned naturally to the best and most flexible exemplar they knew, namely Paul, who in 1 Corinthians declared that he had become a Jew to Jews and a Gentile to Gentiles: "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." That appeared to be a charter for delving deeply into local cultures and languages. Indeed, some Catholic missionaries faced the criticism of having delved so deeply into those local identities that they had thoroughly gone native. We think of Beschi in his guise as a Hindu sannyasi. Even more sensitive was the case of Roberto de Nobili (1577–1656), who went so deep under cover as a Hindu holy man in southern India as to be accused of openly disavowing his Christianity, or his Western origins.

Such cases point to the individualistic character of many of the Catholic missions. Priests or friars were operating deep behind non-Christian lines, commonly in small groups or even alone, and far from the structures of the institutional church. Instructions from superiors might easily take months or years to reach them, leaving them largely open to pursue whatever tactics might seem appropriate. If they sometimes ran out of control, as de Nobili probably did, they also had the opportunity to win converts through their personal character and accomplishments. The most successful strategies in such cases involved the explicit following and imitation of Christ that was such a centerpiece of Catholic Reformation spirituality. Whatever the critical issues dividing Protestant and Catholic churches in Europe, then, practical realities on the ground tended to reduce the distinctions between the missionaries of the respective sides.

Fortunately, the Catholic missions of the Early Modern era are now the subject of intense scholarship, and of first-rate quality. As an intellectual exercise, it would be intriguing to explore a simple question: of all the questions and dilemmas raised by mission throughout Christian history, were there any that the Catholics failed to encounter in their glory years, but which were left for later Protestants to address and solve? I can think of very few.