

Johannes Meier, ed.

*Sendung – Eroberung – Begegnung. Franz Xaver, die Gesellschaft Jesu und die katholische Kirche im Zeitalter des Barock.*

Studies in the History of Christianity in the Non-Western World Vol. 8

Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005, 446 pp.

This volume on “Mission – Conquest – Encounter” contains contributions to a conference organized in Germany 2002 on the occasion of the 450th anniversary of Francis Xavier’s death. It deals with Xavier himself, the Society of Jesus (S.J.) of which he was co-founder, and the Catholic Church during the Baroque age. Xavier was also the “initiator of Catholic missions in the modern period” (p. 1), and especially the founder of the Jesuit mission to Japan. As such he is closely connected with the development of the Catholic Church into a worldwide church (*ibid.*). The framework of the present journal suggests focusing this review on the contributions dealing with Asia, especially with Japan, and putting aside the articles concerning the American continent. The first article, by Michael Sievenich on the Jesuit concept of “mission,” will be introduced since it clarifies some basic issues. It should be mentioned that also Christoph Nebgen’s contribution about application letters of European individuals to the Jesuit General requesting acceptance as foreign missionaries (pp. 67-97) provides important background information about foreign mission, especially about recruiting methods and motivations of missionaries to serve abroad.

Sievenich elaborates that, according to early sources, the Jesuit understanding of “mission” implies the two meanings of “personal” mission (*Sendung*) of individual Jesuits, and of an “territorial” area, or mission field, where missionaries were active. Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* contains the meditation of “conquering all land of infidels,” an idea reflecting the spirit of *reconquista* (reconquer the Iberian peninsula from Muslims, after the Reformation also applied to Protestant parts of Europe) which led Jesuits to call their foreign mission “*conquista espiritual*.” (p. 11) This led the Jesuit order to add to the three ordinary monastic vows (poverty, celibacy, obedience) a fourth commitment to “missions” (*Sendungen*) whereby the order submits itself under the immediate service of the pope. Thus, already in 1540, the year of the Jesuit order’s official recognition, Ignatius sent Francis Xavier as the first overseas missionary to India – upon the order of the Pope and the request by the King of Portugal. Xavier arrived two years later in India, and eventually in Japan in 1549. When Ignatius died in 1556, the Jesuits had already sent about 1.000 missionaries to Africa, India, and South America. Towards the end of this article, the author attempts to evaluate positively the mission endeavor of the Jesuits by playing down the military language used by Jesuits, and by arguing it should be read only “metaphorically.” (p. 26) Such an interpretation ignores historical facts, as subsequent articles in this volume clearly demonstrate. It seems difficult also to declare the Jesuit mission *in general* as pioneer of accommodation and enculturation, as the author attempts to do in the end. In Japan, it was mainly after a considerable lapse of time that the Jesuit visitor Valignano urged the missionaries to

culturally adapt to the Japanese customs. The attempts by Matteo Ricci and other missionaries in China to accommodate religiously were in the end destroyed by (among other reasons) the order itself.

In the article “Francis Xavier and the challenge of non-Christian religions” (pp. 99-117), Klaus Schatz first treats Xavier’s encounter with Islam and Brahmanism in India, and then with Buddhism in Japan. Such a broad approach opens up a wider picture and allows for important comparisons as well. On the one hand, the author shows that Xavier was very critical of these religions and their representatives simply because of his exclusivist concept of salvation (*Heilsexklusivismus*) and his own moral standards as criteria for judging the behavior of non-Christians. On the other hand, the author claims, representatives of Brahmanism in India and of Buddhism in Japan accepted and appreciated Xavier as “dialogue partner.” Even though the author clearly denies any attempt to declare Xavier as “patron of interreligious dialogue” (p. 99), there are some shortcomings in his treatment of this subject. First, he fails to define the nature of Xavier’s form of communication; Xavier involved priests of other religions mainly in *disputations* aimed at defeating and thereby converting them. Second, the author does not identify the motive of Xavier’s interlocutors, which was mainly interest in foreign countries and customs. In the case of Japan, the Buddhists also were interested in his religion, but only in the beginning when they still thought that he had brought a hitherto unknown Buddhist teaching from India. Third, even though the non-Christian priests may have been interested in “dialogue” with Xavier, the author cannot demonstrate any positive interest on Xavier’s side. Thus the “dialogue” cases he mentions were only unilateral forms of communication. This, in fact, speaks against the title of this article: Xavier never responded really to the challenges posed by these religions. Here again, Ricci’s case serves as an example that some Jesuits also attempted to engage in mutual forms of communication. Finally, the author claims that for Japanese the main obstacle to accept the Christian faith was creation theology because it led to the contradiction that God was not compassionate enough to have informed the Japanese about the Christian message right from the beginning of creation. A study of contemporary sources from both sides, however, shows that this point was only one among a number of Buddhist criticisms against Christianity. There were other important obstacles, such as soteriology (e.g., how can Christians adore a criminal who died at the cross?!), the “immortality” of the soul (which the Jesuits thought was essential for their soteriology), and the concept of God as well as the “demythologization” of Buddhas and *kami* as essentially human beings without the power to save. A careful analysis of the Jesuit sources, however, eventually reveals that the most important *theological* reason, among other factors, for the failure of the Jesuit mission in Japan was (as I have elaborated elsewhere) that the missionaries from Xavier onwards refused to acknowledge a natural revelation among the Japanese. Again, this marks a major difference compared with the Jesuit mission in China.

In the next contribution, Elisabeth Gössman provides a historical overview of “Christianity in 16<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> century Japan (*Kirisitanan jidai*).” (pp. 119-138) Beginning

with Xavier's mission activities and principles, she portrays the subsequent history, including Valignano's attempt to accommodate the Jesuit mission to the Japanese culture, the cultural exchange initiated by Jesuits, and finally the oppression and persecution of Christians, ending with the Hidden Christians (*kakure kirishitan*) during the Edo period and the beginning of the Meiji period. An important insight the author provides is the basic distinction between the Jesuit mission in India and that in Japan because of the different framework. Whereas the Jesuits worked in India under Portuguese colonial rule, when coming to Japan they left this realm and thereby "cut the connection between colonialisation and mission." (p. 120) However, the close connection between mission and Portuguese trade still continued in Japan. In her article, Gössmann also corrects some of the misconceptions mentioned above. The theological teaching of the "natural law," supposed to have been revealed also to the Japanese, was never taken up and developed constructively by the missionaries. (p. 122) The author also points out that the Jesuits' communication with Buddhist priests was mostly aimed at their refutation. In this connection she mentions also the important problem of the initially insufficient language skills of the missionaries. (p. 123) Further, she reminds us that such a work as Luis Frois' *History of Japan* clearly documents the aggressive destruction of Buddhist statues, pictures, sutras and temples by Jesuits. (pp. 124, 130) All in all, even though the author does not hesitate to voice her criticism concerning certain Jesuit mission practices, she balances it well with the positive achievements, such as the rich cultural exchange and the development of indigenous Japanese Christianity.

A similarly critical, well balanced, stance is taken in the next article by Maria Cristina Osswald about "The development of the *Modo Goano* – The Indian character of Jesuit art in Goa between 1542 and 1655." (pp. 139-157) This article includes also some illustrations and consists of three parts. First, the author describes phenomenologically the Indian character of Jesuit art, especially how Jesuit buildings in Goa were strongly influenced by indigenous culture. She elaborates a number of architectural and decorative elements taken over from Hindu temple. Sculptures such as Indian deities (*nagas*) came to replace European angels, or the depiction of Mother Mary was influenced by that of the goddess Lakshmi. Second, the author contrasts this development with an elaboration of official Portuguese *Religionspolitik* in Goa characterized by a "*tabula-rasa* method." (p. 139, cf. 147) Most Hindu temples in Goa were destroyed in 1541/ 42, and many churches were built on their places instead. Jesuits, such as Xavier and Valignano, supported this policy. Third, the author inquires why inculturation could occur in spite of such a negative policy. The art style characteristic for Goa at this time, the *Modo Goano*, "developed as an art of encounter between different cultures and civilizations. (p. 147) Religious topics were taken over from Hinduism and Islam. Among the factors for this development were the local Indian artisans and artists themselves, but also a number of Jesuit missionaries appreciating Indian art and culture, as well as the Jesuit strategy to adapt to local cultures. This article on *Modo Goano* also enables interesting comparisons with the situation in Japan, e.g.

the Jesuit attempts to destroy indigenous cults on the one hand, and on the other hand to accommodate to local customs and culture, such as in the development of *Nanban* art and architecture. This contribution shows that notwithstanding modern criticism of previous missionary practice – itself being likewise historically conditioned – the encounter between Christian mission and indigenous religions triggered creative cultural and religious exchanges lasting for centuries. An article like this one, I assume, could also be considered as contribution to a more comprehensive *Wirkungsgeschichte* (reception history) of the cultural encounter between East and West which yet has to be written or compiled.

The next article by Julia Lederle on “The South Indian Jesuit missions in the realm of tensions among European power interests during early modern times” (pp. 159-178) deals with the connection between colonial powers and the Jesuit mission, as well as the accompanying historical changes due to competition among European countries. The Jesuit mission in South India worked under the Portuguese patronage (*padroado*). However, since the Dutch began to interrupt Portuguese trade from Goa by naval blockades in the 1640’s, the mounting defense costs eventually made Portuguese trade difficult and, in the end, caused the collapse of Portuguese colonial power in Asia. (p. 166) This forced the Jesuits to deal first with the Dutch power in India, and then also with the subsequent Protestant missions. Due to Dutch occupation, the Jesuit mission did not only lose political protection, but also the income to finance its work. The antagonistic relationship between the European countries and denominations also caused considerable loss of Jesuit mission territory. This article not only provides a fascinating account of the continuously changing fate of colonialism and missions in South India, it also facilitates interesting comparisons with the fatal role of the Protestant Dutch in Japan since the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, especially their significant cooperation with Japanese government and military to suppress the Catholic church here.

Each article of the book concludes with an abstract in German, English and Spanish. The volume includes a list of the authors. Unfortunately, it does not provide an index of names and subjects which would have been helpful for getting better access to its broad scope of topics. A book such as the present one, containing diverse themes of a broad geographical and historical scope, is naturally not homogenous. This reflects complex realities. However, one wonders if certain inconsistencies and contradictions among individual articles could not have been mended by sufficient communication among the authors during the initial conference, or at least prior to publication. All in all, however, in its variety this volume provides much stimulation for those interested in particular areas of the field, not least because it also facilitates comparisons with related topics and thereby enables new insights.

Martin Repp  
Ryukoku University