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Transcontinental Links, Enlarged Maps, and Polycentric Structures:
A Special Issue on the “Munich School of World Christianity”
Adrian Hermann, Ciprian Burlacoiu, and Peter C. Phan, eds.

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World Christianity is a field of study that encompasses analysis of the histories, practices, and discourses of Christianity as is found on six continents. *The Journal of World Christianity* is particularly concerned with comparative studies of both local forms of Christianity in the areas in which it has historically existed or presently exists, and with the place of Christianity in inter-religious dialogue, the history of interactions between Christianity and persons of other faiths, and interactions between Christian groups separated by confessional, ecclesiastical, geographical, or geo-political divides.

Emanating from the Jerusalem of the first century BCE, carried through diasporic movements of persons and communities, Christianity has for two thousand years been expressed through diverse ecclesiastical traditions. It has been shaped by diverse linguistic and cultural practices, and has been informed by a multitude of world historical and cultural experiences. It is not a “Western religion,” and in that sense no more natural to Italy than to China. The academic field of World Christianity hence seeks to apply the resources of various academic disciplines in which scholars now operate to further understand both the diversity of local expressions of Christian life and faith situated in the world, and the variety of ways that these interact with broader histories, movements, and discourses. It is both critical and constructive.

*The Journal of World Christianity* proposes, by its very conceptualization and organization, an explicit recognition that neither North American nor European academies are the center of the phenomena studied in the field of world Christianity. Simply put, there is no center.

*The Journal of World Christianity* takes as its point of departure that “world Christianity” is not synonymous with “third world Christianity” or other such euphemisms. Nevertheless, the journal is particularly concerned with under-represented and marginalized Christian communities, and this will necessarily result in a greater degree of attention being paid to Asian, African, and Latin American contexts, and the experience of women globally. And although the field is not synonymous with mission studies, and by no means reducible to it, the history of Christian missionary activity will remain vitally important to many studies that the *JWC* will hope to publish.

As a field of study, world Christianity has historically emerged from the former seminary disciplines of mission studies, ecumenical theology, and the academic study of world religions. However, it is important to note that the journal is open to but not constrained to theological studies, and neither is it solely the provenance of those committed to the Christian faith. The journal invites contributions from all disciplines, regardless of religious conviction. We especially wish to engage the broader disciplines of the social sciences and humanities,
and therefore invite contributions from across the spectrum of the academies in the Americas, Asia, Europe, Africa, and Australasia.

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A Note on the “Munich School of World Christianity” and the Special Issue

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Writing the history of global Christianity implies a future where historical enterprise wrestles with the reality of world Christianity critically and imaginatively. Some scholars crunch the numbers connected with the demographics of world Christianity. Others plot out the emergence and reinvention of Christianity on the various continents, especially of the global South. Still others situate major Christian traditions such as global Pentecostalism within the context of the world Christianity movement.

This issue of the *Journal of World Christianity* introduces our readership to the scholarly approach of Klaus Koschorke, professor emeritus of Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Germany, and others associated with this approach. These scholars linked to the project of the Munich School of World Christianity have opted to go in another direction than the ones noted above. They interrelate the mini-narratives and the grand narratives in a new way. They excavate the linkages between Christian communities of different continents rather than across the same continent. They are intrigued by the translocal networks that crisscross the Indian Ocean rim of Asia and Africa, the Pacific rim of Asia and South America, and the South Atlantic rim of Africa and South America. These translocal networks are constituted by linkages where people, theological ideas, and Christian practices are exchanged. These links uncover a fascinating world of Christian interaction outside of the missionary gaze. Christians connect through networks across the global South, promoting “indigenous” agency.

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The Munich School under the leadership of Klaus Koschorke has for nearly twenty years attracted scholars from around the world to its academic conferences in Freising, near Munich, where these linkages have been explored. They have participated in the redrawing of the map of world Christianity, which is dotted with multiple centers of Christian vitality and growth.

In this issue of the *Journal of World Christianity*, edited by Adrian Hermann, Ciprian Burlacioiu, and Peter C. Phan, the reader will find articles that present the scholarly work of the Munich School in various forms. Hermann and Burlacioiu characterize and analyze the scholarship of the Munich School in two co-authored articles. The reader will have the opportunity to read a retrospective article by Koschorke where he frames his historical project, to which I have written a response.

In an article on the African Orthodox Church, Burlacioiu drafts a mini-narrative on this denomination that was founded in New York City during the year 1921 by an Afro-Caribbean immigrant from Antigua: Alexander McGuire. McGuire would be consecrated to the bishopric by a French immigrant, Joseph René Vilatte, who himself had been consecrated in Asia by a Syriac Church bishop, Antonio Francisco Xavier Alvares, who resided in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Through personnel, the African Orthodox Church would emerge in other parts of the United States as well as the Caribbean and Canada. Through newspapers it would reach Africa, resulting in congregations being opened in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Kenya, and Ghana.

In an article on the Philippine Independent Church, a Catholic denomination, Hermann narrates the story of the struggle of this church to find a public voice through its periodicals and a place within the neocolonialism of the United States and the international network of independent Catholic movements in Europe, North America, and Asia.

Frieder Ludwig writes about Mona Hensman, a delegate to the famous World Missionary Conference of Tambaram (India) in 1938. The conference included delegates from other countries in Asia besides India as well as from Africa and Europe. Educated in India and England, Hensman became a leader in the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), including service as the first World YWCA vice president of Asian Indian descent. Ludwig lodges Hensman’s story within the context of the local YWCA in Madras, India, which had an international membership of Asian Indians, Ceylonese (Sri Lankans), British, Americans, Swedes, and Australians along with one Dane, one Persian, one German, and one Canadian.

Roland Spliesgart introduces to the reader the German Protestant diaspora in Brazil in the nineteenth century. This mini-narrative reflects a North-South exchange between Germany and Brazil along with an exchange between France
and Brazil. Crucial to his thesis is the role of the newly invented local culture in the “Brazilianization” of German Protestants.

Paolo Aranha, in his article, debates the conceptual validity of employing the term *Dalit* to any pre-twentieth-century peoples in India. He unravels the various population groups within the Dalits after the independence of colonial India: “Backward Castes,” “Scheduled Castes,” “Scheduled Tribes.” Aranha sneaks into the article a mini-narrative on Africans in India: Siddi communities, military African “slaves.” He notes that these Christians respectively embrace other distinct features.

Peter Phan’s reflections on this special issue and the importance of transcontinental connections for a history of world Christianity conclude this issue presenting the historical project of the Munich School of World Christianity.
Discrimination and Integration of the Dalits in Early Modern South Indian Missions: The Historical Origins of a Major Challenge for Today’s Christians

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ABSTRACT: The persistence of caste hierarchies and discrimination among the Christian faithful is one of the challenges that churches still face in India. While several studies have been devoted to the relation between caste and Christianity since the nineteenth century, the early modern period has attracted very limited attention. This article proposes junctions and figures that can illustrate the various approaches toward caste divisions held by the Catholic missionaries in India between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, namely, from the establishment of the Portuguese presence on the subcontinent until the Malabar Rites controversy. In particular, the article will suggest that, if missionary accommodation (accommodatio) was based primarily on the incorporation of caste structures within the Church, unsuccessful attempts were made to root Christianity in the Indian context while criticizing local social hierarchies contradicting Christian values.

KEYWORDS: Dalits, missionary accommodation, Jesuits, Malabar Rites, early modern Christianity in India

1. A Historical Approach to Dalit Catholic Conditions and Struggles

On November 17, 2003, Pope John Paul II addressed a memorable speech to the bishops of Tamil Națu who had come to Rome for their visit ad limina Apostolorum. The most striking passage was probably the following:

At all times, you must continue to make certain that special attention is given to those belonging to the lowest castes, especially the Dalits.
They should never be segregated from other members of society. Any semblance of a caste-based prejudice in relations between Christians is a countersign to authentic human solidarity, a threat to genuine spirituality, and a serious hindrance to the Church’s mission of evangelization. Therefore, customs or traditions that perpetuate or reinforce caste division should be sensitively reformed so that they may become an expression of the solidarity of the whole Christian community. As the Apostle Paul teaches us, “If one member suffers, all suffer together” (1 Cor. 12:26). It is the Church’s obligation to work unceasingly to change hearts, helping all people to see every human being as a child of God, a brother or sister of Christ, and therefore a member of our own family.

Such a direct and straightforward exhortation, which could easily be interpreted by some of the attending bishops as a direct personal reproach, was a most clear and solemn recognition of the struggle engaged by Dalit Catholics, especially since the 1980s, so as to put an end to forms of discrimination perpetrated within their own church. The Tamil Nadu Bishops Conference and the Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry Conference of Religious of India marked a landmark when they promulgated a “10-point Programme” for the development of Dalit Catholics in Vellore (Vēlūr) on January 30, 1990. Furthermore, the 1990s were declared the “Decade of Dalit Christians.” While many initiatives were undertaken during those years, the results did not meet expectations. For this reason, in November 1999 the Dalit Christian Liberation Movement presented an “Open Memorandum” to Pope John Paul II, requesting in the first place a “Pontifical declaration against the casteism in the Church and the consequent discriminations and deprivations of Dalit Christians.” It is very likely that this very “Open Memorandum” was the single most important cause that triggered John Paul II’s exhortation four years later.

The fact that Indian Christians may be divided into castes is indeed puzzling to their Western coreligionists, as “the question of whether caste exists in Indian Christianity is often another way to ask whether Hindu conceptions of identity persist in Christian communities after conversion.” Such a perplexity arises from the perception of a syncretic and unfulfilled conversion process, one in which the previous Hindu identity has not been fully replaced by a new Christian spirit and faith. However, the Western bewilderment “tendentiously assumes that Christianity is fundamentally egalitarian while Hinduism is inherently hierarchical.” This was definitely an assumption made by Louis Dumont (1911–1998), who maintained that “caste attitudes . . . [had] survived a partial change in the set of beliefs, and an imported religious belief, whose ideological implications remain[ed] little developed, [had] been impotent against them.” However, almost half a century separates us from Dumont’s analysis, whereas
more recent anthropological and historical research has made it increasingly clear that “caste does not persist among Christians merely as a residue of their Hindu environment, ‘weakened and incomplete’ [as suggested by Dumont] in the absence of the ritual justification provided by the ideology of purity and impurity.” The extent to which such an ideology may be applied to the analysis of Indian Christianity is uncertain, as, for instance, “the literature on South Indian Christians provides evidence of the absence or vestigial nature of ideas of pollution . . . and also of their persistence among convert groups.”

Much clearer is the fact that “among Christians, the legitimation of power centered around the Church itself. Church festivals and honors in church ritual became an important mode of signifying and constituting relations of dominance and prestige.” Beyond notions of pollution, a specific factor that should not be overlooked in the analysis of caste conflicts occurring today, and arguably even in the past, is the accumulation of financial and symbolic capital by specific communities in Catholic religious structures and institutions. In this respect, the Jesuit scholar Joe Arun has found in the course of his anthropological research on the Dalits in the northern part of Tamil Nadu that the Naidu and the Reddiyar would not allow the Paraiyars to be treated on equal terms in church activities because they only, the higher castes, had allegedly made possible the very construction of the local churches by collecting taxes within their communities. Many respondents belonging to those leading castes would also suggest that if the Paraiyars really wanted to have a say and exert influence, they should build their own churches. As a consequence, respondents claimed also that the Paraiyars should not be allowed to be treated as equals if they attended churches that had been built with money raised by the other communities, considered socially superior to them. The sense of patrimonial ownership over the sacred space, as much as over the civil one, gets to the point of challenging even the supreme ecclesiastical hierarchies. A Naidu leader explained to Arun how far his high-caste community would push its resistance against attempts made by the church authorities to uplift the condition of Dalit Catholics: “Who is the church? We are the church. Even if the Pope wants to enter our village he has to ask our [the Naidu’s] permission.”

To a Western observer the proud statement “We are the Church!” reminds immediately of the progressive and liberal Catholic movement Wir sind Kirche (We Are Church), committed to a radical enhancement of lay roles against clerical ones according to a peculiar interpretation of the Second Vatican Council. The ironic turn of such an analogy is that, while Western progressive Catholics campaigned, among other things, for a more consistent commitment of the Church to human rights, the same slogan “We Are Church” could be used in South India to justify caste segregation and a sort of religious apartheid within the very Catholic fold.

If caste dynamics can be discerned throughout the whole spectrum of Indian Christianity, it is in Tamil Catholicism that they remain strikingly visible,
giving origin even to violent clashes. In March 2008 a conflict between Dalit and Vanñiyar Catholics in the village of Eraiyūr (Pondicherry diocese) resulted in two victims (two Vanñiyar killed by the police), tens of injured people, and substantial damage to houses and properties on both sides. At its origin was a request for an independent parish serving Dalit Catholics only, so as to allow them to escape the discrimination inflicted in the existing parish by the high-caste faithful on their fellow parishioners of lower social standing. Even more recently, in October 2012, another caste-related disturbance took place in a major sacred spot on the Tamil spiritual landscape, namely, the shrine on the martyrdom site of João de Brito (1647–1693) in the village of Oriyūr. On the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Catholic diocese of Sivagangai (Civakanākai), no fewer than 250 priests and nuns and 25,000 faithful had gathered at Brito’s memorial to participate in a solemn Mass. However, a vocal group of Dalit Catholics staged a strong protest against the local ecclesiastical establishment and the Catholic upper castes. The bone of contention was the expulsion of a young Catholic Dalit from Saint Paul’s Seminary in Tiruchirappalli (Tiruccirāppalī). The youngster had been accused of being responsible for organizing a prank together with five other seminarians of a different caste, who were also expelled with him. The expulsion was interpreted by the protesters as one of many acts of discrimination suffered by Catholic Dalits within their own church. The importance of Brito’s shrine, as well as the solemnity of the diocese Silver Jubilee that was celebrated there, created indeed a perfect stage for giving visibility to the demonstration.

The crucial relevance of caste conflicts within contemporary Indian Christianity, and particularly in Tamil Nātu, is beyond contention. What is less clear is the historical genealogy of such social dynamics. Did the Catholic Church in India have preferences for specific castes in the course of time? Were Dalits consistently ignored by the local hierarchies and by the Holy See? Did caste conflicts between Catholics have an echo beyond the local space within which they concretely took place? Did they ever gain a global dimension? These and other similar questions have drawn until now limited interest by scholars. On the contrary, a specific contribution of Klaus Koschorke and the “Munich School” is precisely the interpretation of today’s global Christianity, indeed a major feature of our times, as the outcome of multidimensional and polycentric historical processes that can be charted only by adopting “changing maps” (“veränderte Landkarten”, literally “modified maps”). Within the “Munich School” my historical investigation is aimed precisely at understanding contemporary South Asian Christianity in the light of its early modern development, namely, before and beyond the British colonial dimension. In this respect it comes as no surprise that there are already studies on caste conflicts among Indian Christians at the time of the British Raj, whereas much less is known about what happened in the early modern period, namely, in the sixteenth–eighteenth centuries, especially in
the Indo-Portuguese context.\textsuperscript{18} Such a neglect can be explained partially with the special difficulties implied by a research in this field. Language is a first issue, as English has a limited relevance for this period, whereas—just to confine ourselves to the European languages—documents are primarily in Portuguese, Latin, Italian, Spanish, French, Dutch, and German. Related to such a linguistic variety is also the fact that the necessary documents are scattered across Europe, much more than in India, and published only to a minimal extent.\textsuperscript{19} These difficulties, as much as an Anglo-Saxon Protestant bias leading to a substantial underestimation of the early Catholic missions to India, may explain why the only volume aiming to present a comprehensive history of the Dalit Christians of India devotes just half a page to this historical phase and context.\textsuperscript{20} As we wait for extensive monographic studies on caste and Christianity in early modern India, here I would like to present some preliminary remarks that may let the reader foresee the great extent and relevance of this historical dimension.

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to discuss the moral and political implications of a specific analytic and linguistic choice. The term \textit{Dalit}, which in English may be translated as “Oppressed” or “Broken,” was attested already in the 1930s, when it was used in Marāṭhī and Hindi newspapers as a translation for the British colonial expression “Depressed Classes.” Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956) used the term \textit{Dalit} in his Marāṭhī speeches, and even in English he resorted occasionally to the translation “Broken men.” However, it was only with the manifesto issued by the Dalit Panthers in 1973 that the term acquired widespread use, both in sociopolitical activism and in academic analysis.\textsuperscript{21} In a recent book on the history of the social practices that were amalgamated under the category of “caste,” Sumit Guha has rightly observed that “many caste names, especially those of Dalit castes, sometimes were and are used as insults.” On the basis of this undeniable fact, in his book the author has “generally replaced them [= the names of the various Dalit castes] with either functional translations or simply ‘Dalit’ or ‘Dalit caste’ in order to avoid such offensive terms.” The terminological caution has been pushed to the point that “in quotations where these terms occurred in the original English source” the author has “inserted a more appropriate translation in square brackets.”\textsuperscript{22} The choice of this distinguished historian deserves careful consideration, particularly for its effort not to perpetuate forms of discrimination even in academic linguistic use. However, calling “Dalits” individuals and communities of the past who never would have indicated themselves with such an expression, and would never have been designated in these terms by other groups, can be an obstacle to an adequate historical understanding of the social conditions current in ages previous to ours. By mechanically replacing the expression “Dalits” with the multifarious caste names that were used to distinguish diverse groups subject to social stigma, especially in the heinous form of “untouchability,” we run the risk
of falling into a politically correct form of self-censorship, whose utility both to scholarship and to sociopolitical activism is rather dubious. Authors who write on Dalit history, especially if not belonging to Dalit communities and concerned with their own authorial legitimation, would then force themselves into very inappropriate situations of unintended irony. In order to avoid specific caste names, a scholar would then be compelled to state, for instance, that a certain Jesuit missionary converted people of “a certain Dalit community” and also of “another Dalit community,” just not to mention that the missionary actually engaged in the conversion of both the Pallars and the Pañjaiyars.\(^\text{23}\) The distinctions between these and many other Dalit communities are historically significant and were fully operational in early modern European accounts of Indian society. Furthermore, the category of “low castes” (castas baixas) had in one of the most significant Christian constellations of early modern India, namely, the Indo-Portuguese world, an extension that was not restricted to the communities defined today as Dalits.

The complexity of the very category of “low castes” can be approached by considering a passage from a sermon delivered and later published by the Italian Theatine Antonio Ardizzone Spinola (1605–1699), missionary in Goa and then successful preacher in Lisbon. Spinola took position in defense of a great number of subaltern Christians for whom the parish priests in Goa impeded access to the Holy Communion, whose yearly reception was actually one of the very “Precepts of the Church.”\(^\text{24}\) Those who suffered sacramental discrimination included slaves, servant boys (moços), beggars (os pobres pedintes), poor people without any means (os nùs, literally “those naked”), Kunbi peasants (os Curubins),\(^\text{25}\) the Śudras in general (os Sudros), palm tappers (os Palmeiros), those producing salt (os saleiros), the Mahār (known then in Goa as Farazes),\(^\text{26}\) African servants and slaves (os Cafres),\(^\text{27}\) “and many other castes of low and miserable people.”\(^\text{28}\) These subaltern groups encompassed entirely those who are today defined as “Dalits” but extended also to communities such as the Kunbi, included since 2004 in the Maharashtra state list of “Other Backward Castes.”\(^\text{29}\) Far from being comparable to any “Scheduled Castes” and “Scheduled Tribes”, the Kunbis are today “a highly stratified caste cluster, centering among peasant cultivators but reaching up to feudal aristocrats and rulers.” Moreover, this caste cluster “is long known for its numerical preponderance and political dominance.”\(^\text{30}\) In an early modern context, European observers could assimilate within the category of “low castes” groups whose descendants are today highly varied in terms of socioeconomic status and political influence. Therefore, it seems reasonable in a scholarly context to avoid the anachronistic projection of a modern category such as the one of “Dalits” and, rather, strive to differentiate, contextualize, and historicize the different communities, so as to detect more precisely the social process in which they were involved.
Moreover, such a caveat is justified if we consider that the early modern European expression “low castes” included also groups whose descendants correspond neither to the Scheduled nor to the Other Backward Castes. If we consider once again Ardizzone Spinola’s list, this is the case of the early modern Cafres, namely, the South Asian Africans who are at the origin of the Siddi communities, spread especially in western India and around Hyderabad, the capital of the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh.31 Those Cafres were defined not only ethnically but also in terms of social status. Distinguished to a certain degree from the Africans whom Spinola included among the “low castes” were the Habshis, East African military slaves serving in the Deccani sultanates.32 If Christian Cafres were deprived even of access to the Eucharist, notwithstanding their baptism, on the contrary, the Habshis who converted to Islam enjoyed better opportunities and could climb the social ladder, as epitomized in a spectacular way by a figure such as Malik Ambar (1548–1626), an Ethiopian military slave who became pēshwā (prime minister) of the Sultanate of Ahmadnagar.33 The condition of Africans in Portuguese India has not been studied extensively, notwithstanding the abundance of available archival sources.34 In light of what is already known, it is likely that most Cafres lived indeed in a condition of misery similar in many ways to that experienced by the various Dalit communities over the course of centuries. However, the descendants of the Cafres did not create a new Dalit caste but, rather, ended up being classified as a Scheduled Tribe. The outcome is somehow paradoxical, inasmuch as the Siddis are—in terms of mere chronology—inhabitants far less “indigenous” or “native” (Ādivāsīs) than most of the communities living in the same regions. Presumably the qualification of the various Siddi communities as Scheduled Tribes is due to “ideas of racial difference and cultural distinctiveness, which have come to underscore Ādivāsī ethnicity.”35 In this sense they could be ascribed to the Scheduled Tribes because of a racial difference and cultural distinctiveness, in relation to the majority society within which they live, allegedly greater than that displayed by the Scheduled Castes. Such a presumed greater degree of differentiation could raise perplexities from a Dalit perspective, particularly in the presence of a strategy of ethnicizing the identities of the various communities, so as to break free from representations of social inferiority imposed by the higher castes. For instance, as observed by Joe Arun, “what the Paraiyars are trying to do is simply a repositioning of their identity in a positive manner, which, according to Hall . . . is a shift in ethnicity that is ‘predicated on difference and diversity.’”36 It could even be argued that, by asserting their ethnic and cultural distinctiveness, the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes are converging and blurring the clear-cut division between the two categories of the Dalits and the Ādivāsīs.
If the predecessors of these two groups (together with the weakest sections of specific communities classified today as Other Backward Castes) could be seen by a European observer in the seventeenth century as part of an overarching order of “low castes,” so in our times they could potentially develop a shared model of an ethnicized identity of resistance and assertion. The very categories of Dalits and Ādivāsīs could then become less relevant in comparison with the newly signified and proudly proclaimed ethnic identities developed by groups that were previously put down as “Depressed Castes and Tribes.” Therefore, the need for not imposing retrospectively and anachronistically the notion of “Dalits” appears even clearer, as with other categories developed recently, which are useful now but could easily be replaced in a near future by other forms of self-representation.

2. Integration or Discrimination? Dalit Christians in Goa, Kerala, and the Madurai Mission

The very English word caste, used generally to indicate a category crucial in all spheres of Indian life, derives from the Portuguese casta. According to an erroneous traditional etymology, the origin of the term lies in the Latin adjective castus (casta and castum in its feminine and neuter forms), meaning “chaste.” Such an opinion was based not only on a perfect phonetic assonance but also on a false deduction drawn from the observation of Indian social patterns. As the persistence of caste divisions is indeed favored by endogamy, a matrimonial model widely verified in India, it was understood that the word caste hinted at a socially restrained sexual behavior, not contemplating intercourse between men and women belonging to different jātis. Such an inference, reasonable at first sight, was actually flawed in at least two ways.

First, the reproduction of certain castes does not take place through endogamy but, rather, by means of hypergamy, namely, the marriage of a woman to a man of a higher caste. An example well known to the Portuguese since the sixteenth century was the matrilineal and polyandrous kinship system of the Nāyars, a martial caste that dominated political life on the Malabar coast. After the celebration of a tali-tying ceremony (talikeṭṭukālyṇam), Nāyar women could enter into multiple relationships (sambandham), not sanctioned by religious rites, with Nambūdiri Brāhmanas, perceived as superior in terms of status, as well as with other men of their own caste. The Nāyars were indeed one of the communities that the Portuguese dealt with from the beginning of their presence in South Asia and that drew their curiosity to the highest degree. Hence, it is very unlikely that the Portuguese could be inclined to characterize the Nāyar community as a “caste,” if this word really hinted at principles of
chastity, as usually understood in early modern Europe. In light of the Christian notion of monogamous marriage, the caste customs of the Nāyars were perceived as totally contrary to chastity, and indeed, “the sexual freedom permitted not only to the men but to the women as well was, unsurprisingly, remarked upon by virtually every visitor to Kerala.”

A second reason that the derivation of *casta* from *castus* is erroneous is due to the fact that the term *casta* had been used on the Iberian Peninsula centuries prior to the Portuguese encounter with India, made possible by Vasco da Gama’s expedition. The connection with a perceived Indian endogamy would then be ruled out, as *casta* was used well before Europeans could establish sustained relations with the peoples of India and become acquainted with their social systems. The linguist Joan Corominas highlighted the occurrences of the noun *casta* in Spanish and Portuguese during the late Middle Ages and suggested that it derived from the Gothic *kasts*, meaning a herd of animals or a brood of birds. The term had a neutral connotation and was used to indicate any type of biological reproduction, so that *castizo* would mean simply “fecund,” “fertile.” However, by the time the Portuguese started to describe as castas the various Indian communities, on the Iberian Peninsula the word had already acquired a double meaning, both of lineage and of endogamous “pure” group. At that point even the Spanish term *castizo* would indicate no longer mere fertility but belonging to a “good” lineage. By the eighteenth century this adjective would acquire a further specification and would be used in Spain to qualify someone whose blood was not “tainted” by Moorish or Jewish blood, understood as “bad” lineages par excellence.

The sixteenth-century Portuguese use of the concept of casta to describe the Indian communities took place in an ambivalent semantic field, defined, on the one hand, by a notion of kinship and biological reproduction and, on the other, by the acknowledgment of a hierarchical order ranking the different social groups. More akin to the first extreme of this range of meanings was presumably a peculiar use of *casta*, equivalent to the current use of *religion*. This acceptation can be seen in a canon of the Third Council of Goa, held in 1585, so as to bring forth the implementation of the decrees of the Council of Trent (1545–63) throughout the Portuguese East, theoretically from eastern Africa up to Japan. The canon targeted those native Christians who traveled outside the Portuguese territory so as to undergo ceremonies of purification and “take the caste of the gentiles.” Reference was clearly made to rites of *śuddhi*, which much later—since the early twentieth century—were particularly promoted by Hindu activists in order to “reconvert” Indians professing religions such as Christianity and Islam.

The use of *caste* to indicate a community of believers, even though defined by specific bonds of kinship and lineage, faded away with the emergence of the
category of “religion” around the age of the Enlightenment.44 What eventually prevailed was the other extreme in the abovementioned semantic range, namely, the hierarchical order ranking different social groups. It should be stressed that, while this is the meaning of caste current even today, according to Corominas such a connotation was clearly present in the Iberian use since the sixteenth century. The very idea of a “good lineage” postulated a “bad” one, and the possibility of ranking each caste in relation to all the others imposed the specification of a “bottom,” namely, a category of castes that were bad in absolute terms, worse than any other ones. Therefore, in order to understand the early modern Catholic approach to caste hierarchies, untouchability, and the discrimination against the communities corresponding to today’s Dalits, we need to acknowledge that the Portuguese did not simply observe and take notice of Indian social practices totally alien to them but—rather unsurprisingly—applied also their own hierarchical mental grid in order to make sense of the native societies they encountered in South Asia. Hence, the existence of and social discrimination against the various communities that today define themselves as Dalits were far from a major surprise to the Portuguese and other European observers. These could be amazed, as we have seen, by the kinship system and the sexual customs of the Nāyars, but they had no reason to find unique or even particularly embarrassing the fact that the higher castes despised the inferior ones. In fact, “late Renaissance Europeans did not invent the idea of vertical social hierarchy, but they emphasized it and graded it more finely than ever before.”45 However, the European hierarchical mind-set was not sufficient to make sense of specific aspects of the Indian social system, namely, the notions of untouchability and the ritual pollution of a person of higher caste by merely touching someone of lower condition. In the eyes of Catholic missionaries and prelates, such ideas appeared reproachable in the first place because they suggested a form of superstition. If one considered oneself “impure” because one entered into contact with someone “untouchable,” this implied a form of excommunication that operated beyond the terms of the one that only the Church could inflict. The point was expressed clearly by a canon of the First Provincial Council of Goa, held in 1567:

In certain parts of this [ecclesiastical] province the gentiles distinguish themselves according to lineages [gerações, “generations”] and castes [castas] of greater or minor dignity, and they consider the Christians as low; they observe [these lineages and castes] in such a superstitious way, that no one from a higher caste can eat or drink with those of the lower one; if he does so, he immediately loses his own caste and the prominence attached to it, remaining in the rank and honor of the one inferior with whom he ate; such a person is called in their language “batalo,”
i.e., a man established out of caste. The observance of such a superstition is prescribed by their sect so strongly that, not even in case of extreme necessity can they eat or drink with someone inferior; quite the opposite, they are obliged to let themselves die. This holy Synod determines that no one shall give food to these gentiles against their will, if they do not want to become Christians. Not only is this a manifest injustice inflicted on them, but also they can easily avoid the situation of being fed so as to become Christians. In fact, [in India] it is a custom that one follows the religion of those he is eating with. This [rule] will not apply in case of an extreme or serious bodily necessity, as it is necessary to follow the law of God, feeding the one who is in need even by force.46

The purpose of the canon was to impede a particular type of forced conversion, namely, one obtained by overzealous missionaries who compelled Hindus (always called gentios, “gentiles,” throughout the early modern period) to lose their caste by becoming polluted in an act of forbidden commensality. It appears clear that the canon was primarily addressed to the Jesuits. Evidence for such an interpretation includes the fact that in 1561, just six years before the First Goan Council, the provincial father António de Quadros (1529–ca. 1571) had written a letter to Dom Sebastião, king of Portugal, claiming that no force was used in the conversions that were achieved by depriving an Indian of his or her own caste, as a consequence of receiving food from the European missionaries.47 Further evidence is provided by Sebastião Gonçalves (ca. 1555–1619), official historian of the Goa Province of the Society of Jesus, who could still claim half a century after the First Council that "no gentile converts to our Holy Faith, if first we do not make him bataló."48 The loss of social standing was considered by those religious as a means of facilitating an exit from the Hindu social fold and an entrance into the Christian one. The Hindu who underwent such a polluting alimentation would be defined in Komāñã as bāt.ló, a term that was connected with the idea of low material value.49 If this canon aimed at forbidding a missionary abuse, the introduction to the norm clarified the Portuguese Catholic understanding of the Indian notion of untouchability. This was condemned not so much because of its contradiction of the principle of Christian charity but, rather, because it attributed a sort of magical power to a trivial circumstance, such as the mere fact of people of different castes eating together changing the social condition of someone to such an extent that even his or her intimate essence was devalued. In order to escape from this powerful mechanism of social degradation, a Hindu would even sacrifice his or her own life, namely, the divine gift that—from a Christian point of view—no one could give up by an act of destructive self-determination. Hence, “superstition” was the category employed by the missionaries in order to understand a society, the
Indian one, that was similar to the European in its strongly hierarchical inspiration but differed from it in specific mechanisms that seemed to conflate the social and the religious spheres.

The delimitation of society and religion in the Indian context was the bone of contention of a fundamental moment in the history of the relation between caste and Christianity, namely, the establishment in 1606 of a new type of Catholic mission by Roberto Nobili (1577–1656) in the Tamil cultural capital of Madurai (Maturai). This Italian Jesuit decided to apply to a “pretercolonial” context, placed beyond the reach of the Portuguese Estado da Índia, a model of radical social and cultural adaptation (known in Latin as *accommodatio*) that the Jesuit Visitor Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606) had previously advocated for the missions of the Society of Jesus in Japan and China. Such a method implied the adaptation of both the missionaries and Christianity to a local context. At stake were not so much the cultural differences between Europe and India as the specific hierarchies in the local societies, within which the missionaries risked being placed at the lowest echelons, as we have seen already acknowledged forty years before at the First Council of Goa in the canon concerning the *bataló*. Nobili believed that the only way to promote the conversion of Indian “gentiles,” and particularly those belonging to the *brāhmaṇical* castes or other communities with high status, was to disentangle Catholicism from any association with the Paranguis, the Europeans (heirs of the “Franks” who fought the Crusades), generally believed in India to be ritually impure, particularly for their food habits and their peculiar notions of hygiene. Nobili presented himself as an Indian penitent (*a śaṁnāyaṁśin*) and stressed the continuity between Christianity and the local spiritual traditions, claiming that he had come to Madurai to preach a lost Veda. More importantly, he never asserted that the principles of Christian charity implied the abolition of the system of untouchability, therefore placing himself in a position that could not be easily reconciled with the qualification that the First Council of Goa had given of such an Indian practice. What the prelates of the Portuguese Orient had condemned as superstition was condoned by Nobili as an innocent social custom.

Moreover, in a defensive memoir sent to the Roman authorities, the Italian Jesuit distinguished two different types of disdain that a missionary could receive from the Indian “heathens.” A first one was addressed to Christ and Christianity as such and should be considered an honor. Nobili was hinting implicitly of a universally known topos of Christian self-representation, formulated eloquently by Saint Paul when he wrote that he and his confreres preached “Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:23). The contempt felt by the Jews and the pagans of the apostolic age would have been understood by Nobili as addressed to a religious doctrine and not as motivated by social disdain. This very factor, on the contrary, was one
that the Jesuit evoked to explain why it had been impossible until then to obtain conversions of high-caste Indians in regions not controlled by the Portuguese. Hence, the second type of disdain against Christians was one motivated not on doctrinal grounds but, rather, due to the mere violation of caste rules:

We are not despised on account of our religion, but solely, as I said, by reason of a political [= civil] custom; nor is this contempt limited to a mere opinion, but it reaches to the point of turning away the heathens from hearing the faith of Christ and leading the neophytes into very heavy persecutions and inextricable difficulties; all this happens, as I said, to no purpose and without any relation with the faith. Nor can these people understand how someone may receive a doctrine on [right] living from an obscure man [= a man with obscure, low birth] without degenerating by this very fact to the obscure customs and to the mean social standing [cultus civilis] of that same teacher.⁵⁴

In the opinion of Nobili, contempt toward Christianity motivated by a difference in social custom did not have a virtuous character and was useless and prejudicial to evangelization. Through a distinction of social and pagan functions in all the aspects defining the life of the Tamil people, Nobili ended up presenting as “indifferent” (the implicit reference to the classical moral category of adiaphora was indeed striking) customs that in the eyes of many of his confreres and other religious authorities could easily be interpreted as superstitious, if not outright pagan.⁵⁵ At the end of a controversy waged both within the Society of Jesuits and against the highest ecclesiastical authorities of Portuguese India, Nobili’s position was endorsed in 1623 by Pope Gregory XV’s brief Romanæ Sedis Antistes, which stated that the Madurai neophytes (in particular the male ones) were allowed to use certain signals that allegedly meant only a social distinction. These included sandalwood signs smeared on the forehead known as tilakas, a hair tuft called in Tamil kuḍumi and in Sanskrit śikhā (in Latin it was corumbynum), and a thread worn across the shoulder known in Tamil as pūnūl and in Sanskrit as yajñopavītam. A fourth concession concerned the use of certain daily baths, to be interpreted only as actions of bodily care rather than pagan ablutions.⁵⁶

While the Romanæ Sedis Antistes could be interpreted as a victory of Nobili over his detractors, both within and without the Society of Jesus, it also contained a final invitation of great importance. Gregory XV exhorted the neophytes to overcome their social aloofness and consider people of lower castes as not inferior to them, as far as the spiritual life was concerned. The final point of the brief was not a ban or a concession but a mere invitation. Even if it did not contain a norm supported by sanctions, its meaning was nonetheless
particularly relevant. Gregory XV urged and implored the high-caste neophytes of the Madurai mission to consider how ephemeral the glory and the prestige they were so proud of was. Their human nobility had passed away, and they had to consider, on the contrary, that by becoming Christians they were part of a body whose head, Christ, was meek and humble and made no distinction among people, particularly within the Church. The Indian neophytes of high caste, to whom the concessions of the Romanæ Sedis Antistes were addressed, should therefore cease to despise people of lower condition, particularly within the Church. The pope used words that have a strong resonance even today: “In fact it is better to be seen with the humble ones than to be seen far away with great people, and it is better to be associated for the short time of this world with the despicable ones, than to be separated in the everlasting life, together with those who used to despise, from the assembly of the righteous.”57 The final clause of the brief echoed innumerable biblical passages on God’s preference for the poor over the rich, and its eschatological perspective reminded of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31), suggesting that at the end of time those who despised the humble ones would be despised in their turn. If the clause was a strong exhortation to overcome caste prejudice within the Church, it fell short of imposing an unequivocal ban on all forms of discrimination. It was clearly understood that in the realm of social hierarchies no change could occur instantaneously and that only time could lead to a greater degree of equality among the Indian neophytes, especially in their spiritual life. Notwithstanding such a limit, the final clause was in any case an important qualification on the requests made by Nobili and his supporters to the Holy See. It also represented the first official position taken by the Holy See on the condition of the Christians belonging to the lowest castes.

The gradualist approach displayed by the Romanæ Sedis Antistes was in continuity with the one expressed by the Portuguese ecclesiastical authorities in India a quarter of a century before. In 1599 Archbishop of Goa Aleixo de Meneses (1559–1617) convened a synod in the town of Diamper (Portuguese spelling for the Malayālam toponym Udayamperūr), with the purpose of reducing the Christians of Saint Thomas, part of the Eastern Syriac tradition, to the doctrine and the discipline of the Latin Church.58 In a canon the archbishop and the clerics attending the synod agreed on the abstract principle that all Christians are equal because “all adore the same God, all have the same faith and make use of the same sacraments, and there is no distinction of high or low people, since He is the same Lord of all.”59 The official biographer of Meneses, the Augustinian friar Antonio de Gouvea (1575–1628), admitted that in spite of his great efforts, on this point the prelate was unable to find a concrete remedy.60 While the archbishop succeeded in eradicating all traces of an alleged Nestorian contamination, he was also compelled to make concessions to
customs and social dynamics that did not have a clear foundation in heresy or “paganism.” Notwithstanding the asserted equality of all the Christians in front of God and the Church, the synod acknowledged that a high-ranking community such as the Saint Thomas Christians would have lost its contact with the nobles and the lords of Malabar (and a specific reference was made to the Nāyār caste) if everyone knew that they shared their churches with neophytes belonging to the “low castes” (castas baixas, translated in the Latin version of the canon as stirpe obscura progeniti, “those born from an obscure lineage”). The solution proposed by the synod was to appoint priests and churches devoted exclusively to the spiritual care of the lower communities. While waiting for the implementation of such measures, the synod prescribed that the Christians of “obscure lineage” would attend Mass from the porches of the local churches. Finally, the synod expressed the hope that the king of Portugal (a country then united personally with the Kingdom of Spain, ruled by the Habsburg dynasty since 1580), “on account of the great power that exert[ed] in [those] regions” (pelo grande poder que tem nestas partes), would undertake effective steps so as to obtain from the various indigenous rulers the ascription to the ranks of nobility of all the local Christians, whatever their caste by birth might be.

The canon was interesting also for two other aspects. First, it acknowledged in its introduction that the lower castes were more prone to convert to Christianity than the Nāyars and other “nobles.” For this reason, the synod “had desired very much to find a way so that those among them [= the lower castes] could rejoin the other Christians in a single church.” Second, it attributed the resistance of the Saint Thomas Christians to sharing their churches with coreligionists of lower social standing merely to the fear of social sanctions from the surrounding Hindu environment, and therefore it implicitly excluded the possibility that the faithful of higher condition could themselves actually believe in an alleged intrinsic necessity of untouchability and caste segregation. In his account of Meneses’s enterprise Gouvea emphasized that the Saint Thomas Christians were willing to do whatever possible in respect to overcoming the total sacramental segregation of the lower castes. Incidentally, in the attitude toward the segregation of and discrimination against the lower castes we find further evidence supporting a thesis advanced by Ines Županov, namely, the analogy of the Saint Thomas Christians with the Madurai mission in terms of accommodatio. This analogy could even be understood as the reception by the latter mission of a method experimented on over the centuries by the former.

Despite the forced latinization of the Saint Thomas Christians, the Synod of Diamper did not represent at all an end to the processes of indigenization experienced by Eastern Syriac Christianity in India. Though the bonds with the alleged Nestorian tradition were severely strained, Aleixo de Meneses officially accepted a social practice that was indeed “indigenous,” namely, the
untouchability and segregation of the lower castes. The precise terms of such an indigenization can be seen when considering another canon of the synod, prohibiting all rituals aiming at “purifying” water tanks that had allegedly been polluted by contact with low-caste people. Such rituals were banned because they were an “unbearable superstition” and “alien to the Christian religion.” In its original Portuguese text the canon used the notion of desempoleamento, translated in the Latin version with an almost identical desempoleamentum. The expression derived from the name of a specific caste, today included among the Dalits, that is, the Pulaiyar of Kerala. From the name of that community originated two other Portuguese verbs, empolear(se) and desempolear(se), meaning, respectively, “to pollute (oneself)” and “to purify (oneself) from such a pollution.” These lexical creations testify to the stigmatization of a specific Dalit community, as well as to the ubiquitous nature and deep rooting of the practice of untouchability in the context of early modern Malabar and South India. The commitment of the Synod of Diamper against the belief in desempoleamento, that is, against the idea of purification from an alleged contamination due to contact with a person of low caste, was justified by the presence of “pagan” rituals that the local population considered able to “purify” a person from such a defilement.

This single factor marks the distinction between the two canons that we have examined. In the first one, the segregation of the low-caste faithful from their coreligionists was justified by the absence of clearly visible superstitious rituals. As far as the Saint Thomas Christians did not want to attend Mass together with their brethren of lower social standing, it was still possible to claim that the issue at stake was social disdain rather than a superstitious belief. The second canon, on the contrary, condemned local purification practices as an articulation of untouchability that could not be detached from Hindu rituals, namely, from what appeared as “superstition” to an early modern Christian observer. As based on a misguided belief, the discrimination against the low castes was understood by Gouvea as part of a set of “barbaric, obnoxious, and irrelevant customs” and deserved condemnation both for its “superstition” and for its “vanity.”

The Synod of Diamper and the publication of the Romane Sedis Antistes define a quarter of a century during which the Catholic missions in India, following models already experimented on in Japan and later in China, sought forms of adaptation to the local hegemonic communities. The hope was to convert the Indian “nobles,” variably identified either with the Brāhmaṇas or with various martial castes. Such a dynamic was not restricted to the Madurai mission only, presented by older studies as antithetical to the cultural era-sure allegedly experienced in Goa and in the Malabar region. However, in the course of the seventeenth century this model of hierarchical adaptation of
Christianity to Indian conditions had to be revised, in light of both the relative dearth of conversion waves among the highest castes (especially the Brāhmaṇas) and the growing quantitative relevance of neophytes belonging to subaltern communities.

3. Missionary Cross-Dressing, the Malabar Rites, and the Oppression of Dalit Christians

The Madurai mission, presented initially (especially to the Roman authorities during the controversy that preceded the Romanæ Sedis Antistes) as an apostolic vineyard whose branches were primarily learned and wise Brāhmaṇas, expanded itself mainly through spontaneous mass conversions of Paraiyars. The model of the sāmnyāsin missionaries, inaugurated by the very founder Roberto Nobili, became less and less relevant, as the proclaimed brāhmaṇical or noble status of these religious did not allow them to interact with and take care of the lower castes. A solution was found with the introduction of a new type of missionaries, able to command respect from all communities but not restrained in social interaction as much as a sāmnyāsin. The one responsible for this innovation was the Portuguese Jesuit Baltasar da Costa (1610–1673), who adopted the garb and lifestyle of a paṇṭāram, namely, a Śaiva priest applied to the spiritual care of the lower castes. While the principle of accommodatio was confirmed once again, Costa departed from Nobili in his interpretation of Tamil society. Instead of following a textual approach and considering the four varṇas as an adequate model for understanding the concrete social reality of India, Costa proposed a ternary scheme, having at its apex the Brāhmaṇas and at the bottom, quite unsurprisingly, the Paraiyars. What was indeed surprising and differed from Nobili’s textual framework was Costa’s acknowledgment of the existence of a second and intermediary broad partition, including kings, merchant castes, and the śudras. While Costa and the paṇṭāram missionaries who followed his example were entitled to interact with the lower castes so as to catechize them, they still did not challenge the principle of untouchability and the segregation of the lower communities. In other words, administration of the sacraments to the Paraiyars and the other castes that compose today the Dalit constellation had to take into account the rules on purity and pollution.

The precise character of this new category of missionaries can be gleaned from the description provided in 1707 by the Portuguese Jesuit Francisco Laines (1656–1715), for twenty-two years a member of the Madurai mission and then appointed bishop of São Tomé de Meliapor. In his Latin Defense of the Indian Missions, Laines explained why and how the Jesuit missionaries moved from the Brāhmaṇa sāmnyāsin to the paṇṭāram model. The Jesuit
stressed that Nobili’s system was the most appropriate to convert the Brāhmaṇas and the other high castes. If many among these higher groups had embraced Christianity, then it would have been easy to also convert the lower castes (inferiores Tribus), clearly hinting at a sort of domino effect. However, the “laws of charity” (charitatis leges) did not allow missionaries to neglect the conversion of those lower castes, who would have perished without obtaining salvation, while the Christianization of the higher castes was still ongoing. Furthermore, the lifestyle of the Brāhmaṇas did not allow the missionaries to catechize the “vile ones” (ignobiles), namely, the Paṇḍiayar (Parreas). For this reason it was decided that the new missionaries who would come to Madurai would call themselves panṭāram Kṣatriyas (Pandare Cxatirienses), belonging to the varṇa of the Rājas (ex Rajorum ordine) and living almost in the same way as the Brāhmaṇa saṃnyāsinīs. Laines confirmed not only that Baltasar da Costa was indeed the first panṭāram Jesuit but also that—in the course of his expedition back to Europe (1670–73)—he was received benevolently by the pontiff then reigning. Pope Clement X (1670–76) requested that Costa show him the dress used by the missionaries in the Madurai region. Laines’s note on Costa’s panṭāram “fashion show” corresponds with observations made by Antonio Franco a decade later. This Portuguese Jesuit biographer observed that Costa did not change his rigorous panṭāram lifestyle even during his stay in Europe. He would never eat meat and fish or drink wine, and he would sleep only on hard planks.

Costa’s panṭāram self-fashioning even outside the Madurai mission and India was not due only to a papal request and was not even the idiosyncrasy of a single European whose apostolate in India had led to a pathological identity crisis. Rather, I argue that it was part of a specific pattern of cultural cross-dressing. Missionaries who had adopted Oriental clothes in various Asian missions, so as to carry on more effectively their apostolate by bridging cultural differences, would often wear those same exotic dresses—permanently or to a certain extent—even if they had a chance to go back to Europe, hence not reverting to their “natural” Western religious dress. While a systematic investigation on this phenomenon is still awaited, a major figure attesting it was the Walloon Jesuit Nicolas Trigault (1577–1628). Appointed procurator of the China mission, where he resided and worked for about three years (1610–13), he traveled across Europe between 1614 and 1618 so as to promote the interests of that missionary endeavor in front of religious and secular authorities. As observed by Liam Brockey, “Besides the plain black robes typically worn by the members of his order, [Trigault] also carried the silk robes that mission founder Matteo Ricci had controversially insisted the China Jesuits wear to bolster their image among the intellectual elite whom they considered their peers in the Ming Empire.” It is also thanks to his self-fashioning as a Chinese literatus that “for at least an entire generation of Jesuits and supporters of the Society Trigault was
the face of the China mission, the man who gave human form to the reports of missionary glory sent year after year from the order’s far-flung mission fields.” Furthermore, it was in Chinese dress that Trigault was portrayed by Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) in 1617. By referring to both the typical Jesuit “plain black robes” and the “silk robes” of the Ming literati, Brockey highlights Trigault’s mobility between European and Chinese attires. Such a capacity was displayed also by Costa, who could shift smoothly from his Portuguese identity to the role of pāṇḍāram Kṣatriya, if the circumstances called for it. While Costa showcased his Indian appearance to a pope, in 1722 Dom João V, king of Portugal (r. 1706–50), granted an audience to the Portuguese Jesuit António de Magalhães (1677–1735), “richly dressed in Chinese custom and performing all the ceremonies that on such occasions are used by the Chinese ambassadors.” While Costa represented in his dress a specific missionary model, Magalhães stressed with his external appearance the quality of ambassador appointed by the Chinese emperor Kāngxī (1654–1722).

Cultural cross-dressing is a practice that has been studied by scholars in the context of European Orientalism. The foundational reference for such an approach is Said’s statement that “Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand.” If the capacity to adopt the external appearance of non-European people by dressing in their fashion is a sign of such Western “flexible positional superiority,” then it can be argued that “what is achieved through these cross-cultural (and cross-class) incursions is a dream of surveillance” and that “unlike the ideal of the panoptic eye which fixes its disciplinary subject, the dream of cross-cultural dressing has to do with the pleasures of an active display of power.” If such an analysis could be relevant even in the case of the early modern Catholic missions, then it would appear that the Jesuit cultural cross-dressing in a European context, when no pragmatic reason could justify it, would be primarily an expression of Western Christian control over native converts. However, other readings are also possible. As argued by Mary Alberts, “Humour, play, transformation and transgression: such are the pleasures of cultural cross-dressing and the source of its longstanding appeal within Western culture. As an artefact of cultural contact, cultural cross-dressing often expresses a desire to court the exotic and at times threatening possibilities of cultural difference.”

Particularly relevant in the Jesuit case seems to be the pleasure of transformation, rather than the ones of humor, play, and transgression. The representation in early modern Europe of a Jesuit Mandarin or a pāṇḍāram Kṣatriya stood for the capacity of a missionary to transform himself into another man and simultaneously to control another civilization, by placing himself in specific social roles of the native societies. In the Indian case, this meant an alleged
Jesuit capacity to win incorporation within the local higher castes, escaping from the risk of being classified as a Parangui while being able to also take care of Parreas. However, this dynamic of control by means of self-transformation had a fundamental condition: the stability, if not fixity, of the society that the missionary wanted to conform to. Trigault, Costa, and Magalhães could showcase their missionary achievements only by presenting Chinese and Indian societies as organized according to a stable, ordered, and knowable hierarchical scheme. The silk robes of the China missionaries and the austere dress of the panṭāram Kṣatriyas, as different as they were in sartorial quality and economic appreciation, implied a solidification of social hierarchies in the representation of non-European societies affected by contact with the West. In the Indian context this necessarily implied the inconceivability of a social rise for those depressed groups that are today called Dalits.

As history and reality escape binary oppositions and easy classifications, the connection between the representational solidification of native hierarchies and the practice of accommodatio is not a reassuringly one-to-one correspondence. While accommodatio indeed reinforced and stiffened native social hierarchies, it is still possible that a minority position in which the missionary representation of self in Europe as an “Indian,” primarily by means of cultural cross-dressing, was accompanied by a critique of native social hierarchies and well-established models of accommodatio. Such an eccentric posture, inventive as much as contradictory, was displayed by Vigilio Saverio Manci (1666–1743), a Jesuit missionary hitherto almost ignored by historians.82 After a long search, I eventually found, at the very center and source of the “Munich School of World Christianity,” namely, in the Central Library of the Ludwig Maximilian University, the only surviving visual representation of Fr. Manci (Figure 1). While it cannot compete with the artistic excellence of Rubens’s portrait of Trigault, it is extremely precious in historical terms. As specified in the Latin caption, the drawing was made in February 1721, when Manci was passing by the Bavarian Jesuit College of Ingolstadt, to a certain extent a predecessor of the current Ludwig Maximilian University.83 The Jesuit was dressed as a typical missionary of the Madurai mission, namely, as a panṭāram Kṣatriya. However, it is far from obvious that Manci would wear such dress. As we have seen, Nobili and Costa had different readings of the Indian social system but still agreed on the basic principle that a method of radical accommodatio was necessary in order to obtain the conversion of the Indians living beyond territories controlled by European powers. On the contrary, Vigilio Saverio Manci was the single most vocal opponent within the entire Society of Jesus of the method followed in the missions of Madurai, Mysore, and the Carnatic.84 Although not hostile to all forms of accommodatio, he provided to the Roman Inquisition the crucial empirical evidence that was required to ban the Malabar Rites.
An attempt to a comprehensive study of these rites and of the controversy that was fought over them during the first half of the eighteenth century is made in my doctoral research. The intricacies of the topic as well as space limits do not allow for a detailed presentation of the Malabar Rites controversy here. Suffice to
say that a number of practices allowed by the Jesuits in the missions of Madurai, Mysore, and the Carnatic came under the scrutiny of the Roman authorities and that between 1704 and 1744 several customs, eventually known as “Malabar Rites,” were forbidden by the Holy See. Contrary to a common belief, the issue at stake was not the extent to which Christianity could be adapted to a non-European culture but, rather, the definition of the limits to which the Indian church could incorporate mechanisms of caste reproduction and caste division. Whether the controverted rites were certain specific types of tilakas or particular ritual ablutions (all aimed at enforcing caste division), or otherwise ceremonies celebrated on the occasion of marriages or on the occurrence of girls’ first menses (typical examples of rituals aiming at caste reproduction), at the end the real issue was always the perpetuation of castes and therefore of Dalit oppression. Certain “Malabar Rites” dealt with Parreas in a very direct way. This included the separation of “untouchables” from “noble” Christians in churches, even resorting to walls and architectural divisions, as well as the administering of the Viaticum to Christians of lower social standing only outside their huts, so as to avoid any contamination of the priests and the sacred objects involved in the sacramental action. Among the issues examined by the Roman Congregation of the Holy Office, that is, the Roman Inquisition, there was also a belief allegedly held by high-caste neophytes of the Madurai, Mysore, and Carnatic regions. Capuchin missionaries had informed Rome that the native elites converted by the Jesuits believed that Parreas were not only socially unworthy but even incapable of attaining eternal salvation. The logical consequence of such an alleged belief, constantly denied by the Jesuit missionaries, was that Parreas should not even be baptized. The Roman Inquisition—with the approval of Pope Benedict XIV—decided to write an instruction to the Capuchins (but not to the Jesuits) urging them to persuade high-caste catechumens on the falsity of such an opinion, while not calling into question the validity of strict hierarchies in the social and political domain.

If the official position of the Jesuits was that the Malabar Rites were not tainted by any superstition and did not violate principles of Christian charity, an eccentric missionary such as Manci thought in a different way. After twenty years of apostolate in the Tamil region, he came to the conclusion that many of the rites allowed by his confreres could not be tolerated at all. The Jesuit establishment did not appreciate such a dissenting opinion: Manci was sent back to Europe, and notwithstanding his repeated requests, he was no longer allowed to revert to his missionary field and remained confined in Jesuit residences in Italy and Upper Germany. Although his exile away from India could appear initially as the expulsion of a troublemaker, by getting back to Europe he came close to the Roman Inquisition, eager to gather data that could substantiate a general condemnation of the Malabar Rites. Manci provided the information required, and his Jesuit credentials were particularly precious, as they allegedly
demonstrated that the Roman opposition to the methods of Madurai, Mysore, and the Carnatic was not due to anti-Jesuitic influences.

As a Jesuit hated by his fellow Jesuits and as an adversary of the Malabar Rites who, once back in his province in Upper Germany (including Trentino, as much as Tirol and Bavaria), allowed himself to be portrayed in the garb of a panṭāram Kṣatriya, Manci was indeed a man with strong individuality, a delight in controversy, and a flair for subversion. In his portrait of 1721 he performed the usual Jesuit exercise of cultural cross-dressing at the same time that he was preparing to denounce the practices tolerated by his confreres in India. We might wonder whether the portrait is an egregious instance of Jesuit dissimulation, with Manci pretending to support accommodatio while preparing to inflict a mortal blow on that method. Such an interpretation would probably confirm stereotypical notions of Jesuit duplicity, but it would also fail to take note of the delightful historical contingency that primary sources occasionally display with utmost clarity, if only they are found. The key to Manci’s paradoxical portrait, and therefore the way to access his subversive missionary vision, is provided by another Munich treasure: an anonymous Italian dialogue, conserved only in a manuscript copy held by the Bavarian State Library. The text has no title but consists basically of a dialogue between a Brāhmaṇa (a Bramane, writes Manci) and an “Indian” (Indiano). Manci’s authorship is clearly demonstrated by the concurrence of biographical data mentioned in the dialogue and known from other archival sources. The “Indian” is none other than the very Manci, defining himself as an “idiot” and claiming “ignorant simplicity” as his major feature. As for the Brameni, a distinction is made between the ones of the Indies and those of Europe. The Indian claims that the Brāhmaṇas of the Indies do not display as many bad actions (magagne) and plots (cabale) or such sophistication (raffinatezza) as the Brāhmaṇas from Europe. This passage alone shows the explosive nature of Manci’s dialogue: a vitriolic anti-Jesuitic text written by a Jesuit! The European Brameni are compared with the real ones of India, namely, the Brāhmaṇas properly said, with the former being presented as far worse than the latter. Manci creates for himself the ironic mask of the Indian, playing with the Italian expression fare l’indiano, “to do the Indian,” used even today to indicate someone who feigns ignorance and pretends to be a simpleton without the most basic knowledge.

If we consider once again the four pleasures of cultural cross-dressing mentioned by Mary Alberts, it appears that Manci’s “Indian” portrait of 1721 is indeed a coded text of humor, play, and transgression. By comparing Costa’s self-fashioning with that of Manci, we realize that the attire of the panṭāram is a polysemous sign: it can presuppose an existing social order, such as the caste society consecrated by the Malabar Rites, but it can also subvert it. If Baltasar da Costa was a self-proclaimed Kṣatriya acting as a panṭāram, Manci was, rather, an Indian signified by the emblem of a panṭāram. His cultural cross-dressing did not
assert a European flexible positional superiority; on the contrary, it denounced
the reification of Indian society and the endorsement of its superstitious and
unjust social structures by his Jesuit confreres. Presenting himself as an Indian
opposed to the Brameni both of the Indies and of Europe, Manci highlighted in
the clearest way how accommodatio and inculturation are neither synonyms nor
concepts deriving linearly from each other. Manci’s self-fashioning as an Indian
was indeed an act of deep “inculturation” and, at the same time, an indictment
of accommodatio and its casteistic assumptions. It would be difficult to represent
Vigilio Saverio Manci, born in a newly ennobled family, as a sort of Dalit theo-
logian ante litteram; however, in the conditions of the early eighteenth century,
he fought successfully against a system that sacrificed Christian charity on the
altar of mere numerical proselytism. Without Manci there would have been no
ban on the Malabar Rites—or at least not in the form this took eventually with
Benedict XIV’s bull Omnium Sollicitudinum, issued on September 12, 1744.94 In
turn, without this prohibition of the Malabar Rites, although effective only to a
limited extent, and without the gradual elaboration of a Christian critique of caste
discrimination, even the unequivocal stand taken in front of the bishops of Tamīl
Nāṭu by John Paul II in 2003 would have been inconceivable. Manci, a hitherto
unknown figure in missionary history, has gained in our eyes a face and witty
personality thanks to the traces that he left in Munich. It is also from this city, and
from the school established by Klaus Koschorke, that a significant contribution is
being made to the study of world Christianity, so as to understand the fascinating
complexity of this global religious experience both in the past and in our times.

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the history of early modern Catholic missions.

NOTES
The Indian names are spelled according to the National Library at Calcutta romaniza-
tion system and the Tamil Lexicon (Madras: University of Madras, 1936), with the ex-
ception of widely used anglicized toponyms and Indian words in quotations from other
authors. This article is based on the research that I have undertaken for my doctoral
dissertation, “Malabar Rites: An Eighteenth-Century Conflict on the Catholic Missions in South India,” supervised by Prof. Diogo Ramada Curto and about to be defended at the European University Institute, Florence.

1. For the history of these periodical visits of bishops to the “threshold of the Apostles” Peter and Paul, see Januarius Pater, Die bischöfliche Visitatio Liminum SS. Apostolorum: Eine historisch-kanonistische Studie (Paderborn, Germany: Schöningh, 1914). On the position of these visits in the framework of current canon law, see Giuseppe Favale, La visita ad limina apostolorum (Rome: Pontificia Università Lateranense, 2005); Roberto Remedia, La visita del Vescovo Diocesano ad limina apostolorum (can. 399–400) (Rome: Pontificia Università Lateranense, 2008).


3. As I will discuss later, Dalits is the current official name used to indicate various Indian communities that were known in the past either as “untouchables” or with Western renderings of the name of a specific Dalit community of South India, namely, the Paraiyar. A description of this specific community, made according to the standards of colonial anthropology, is to be found in Edgar Thurston, Castes and Tribes of Southern India (Madras: Government Press, 1909), 6:77–139. In English the comprehensive name of all these various communities was rendered as Pariahs, whereas in early modern Portuguese, Spanish, and Italian the forms Pareas and Parreas were frequent. It is remarkable that the plural Parreas was regularly used in the Italian sources on the Malabar Rites controversy (see section 3 below), notwithstanding its exotic ending in /s/. In fact, in modern Italian only the invariable word Paria is used, whereas in Portuguese and Spanish the form Pariás is found today. In administrative and political terms the Dalits are known in India as Scheduled Castes, as they are included in a special list contained originally in The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950. These castes are identified as communities that should be supported by Indian public authorities through measures of affirmative action, especially in terms of job and educational reservations. See A. K. Vakil, Reservation Policy and Scheduled Castes in India (New Delhi: Ashish, 1985). Recipients of such support are also Scheduled Tribes, namely, the indigenous communities of India experiencing conditions of socioeconomic marginality that were listed originally in The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950. We will see later that the distinction between “Scheduled Castes” and “Scheduled Tribes” is sometimes quite blurred.


6. To determine the precise genesis of the papal speech to the Tamil bishops it would be necessary to consult all the available documents preserved in the Vatican Secret Archives, with special reference to the correspondence of the Secretariat of State with the Apostolic Nunciature in New Delhi. According to a consistent practice, access to the
documents of a specific pontificate is made possible only seventy years after the death of the pope then ruling. In the case of John Paul II this would mean that the relevant documents will be accessible only in 2075!


13. The movement started in Austria and then expanded to Germany and the rest of Europe. In 1996 it presented an “Appeal from the people of God,” signed by 2.5 million Catholics, asking Pope John Paul II to take a more progressive and liberal position on moral and ecclesiological issues. See Burkhard Menke, “Wir sind Kirche”: Das Kirchenvolks-Begehren in der Diskussion (Freiburg: Herder, 1995).


20. John C. B. Webster, *A History of the Dalit Christians in India* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), from the last line of p. 33 to half p. 34. Webster observes that “there is almost no scholarly literature on the Roman Catholics and the Dalits during this period [= nineteenth century], perhaps because of a preoccupation with jurisdictional disputes during the nineteenth century. One mass movement in which they were fully involved occurred among tribals and has been well studied. See Fidelis de Sa, *Crisis in Chota Nagpur* (Bangalore, 1975)” (33n3). Such an assessment still remains valid to a great extent, although mention should be made also of Thomas Anchukandam, SDB, *Catholic Revival in India in the Nineteenth Century: Role of Mgr. Clément Bonnand (1796–1861)*, 2 vols. (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 1996). Anchukandam’s work is particularly useful for its analysis of the resumption in the nineteenth century of controversies on the Malabar Rites, practices that—as we will see later—are primarily concerned with the reproduction and distinction of castes and include also the enforcement of untouchability against Dalit Christians in the sacramental realm. A very recent attempt to contrast the Anglo-Saxon Protestant underestimation of the early modern Catholic missions to India has been undertaken in Ângela Barreto Xavier and Ines G. Županov, *Catholic Orientalism: Portuguese Empire, Indian Knowledge (Sixteenth–Eighteenth Centuries)* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015).


23. A colonial gaze on the Pallars is provided in Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, 5:472–86.

24. The list of the “precepts” or “commandments of the Church” varied slightly across time and regions both in its extension and in its order. See Antoine Villien, *A History of the Commandments of the Church* (Saint Louis: B. Herder, 1915). In his influential *cartinha*, published as part of a primer of the Portuguese language, João Barros mentioned five *mandamentos da igreia* (precepts of the Church) and phrased the third one in the following terms: “Tomára comunham per obrigaçãem em dia de pascoa: ou ante ou depois segundo o costume do bispado” [To take communion on the day of Easter as an obligation: either before or after according to the custom of each diocese] (*Grammatica da lingua portuguesa com os mandamentos da Santa Madre Igreja* [Lisbon: Luís Rodriguez, 1539], B iii).


27. The Portuguese term derived from the Arabic *kāfir*, “unbeliever,” applied especially to the people of eastern Africa who had not yet been converted to Islam. Ibid., 1:170–71.


ed. Kiran Kamal Prasad and Jean-Pierre Angenot (Bangalore: Jana Jagrati Prakashana, 2008), 167–81; Rene Jan Barendse, “Slavery and Slave Trades,” in Arabian Seas, 1700–1763 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 3:1169–1320 (focusing on West India as well as on Mozambique and Madagascar); Giuseppe Marcocci, “Tra cristianesimo e Islam: Le vite parallele degli schiavi abissini in India (secolo XVI),” Società e Storia 138 (2012): 807–22; and Ernestine Carreira, “Peripheral Activities and Peripheral Networks: Goa and the Globalisation of the Slave Trade in the Modern Era,” in Globalising Goa (1660–1820): Change and Exchange in a Former Capital of Empire (Goa: Goa 1556, 2014), 381–460. Documents on the trade and ownership of African slaves are abundant in the Historical Archives of Goa (officially named the “Directorate of Archives and Archaeology”), especially in its large collection of customs records (alfândegas). In this sense the conclusion drawn by Jeanette Pinto is not fully satisfactory: “There is no paucity of Portuguese statistics, but a close examination rules out the possibility of an exact estimate of the slave population for any given period of time. There was a diaspora of slaves all over the various Portuguese pockets of India, viz. Bassein, Bengal, Cannanore, Cochin, Daman, Diu and Goa” (Slavery in Portuguese India, 32–33). It would be more accurate to say that until now no real attempt has ever been made to calculate the slave population, composed to a great extent by Africans, on the basis of a systematic perusal of the available archival sources.


37. In British colonial interpretations of Indian society the hypergamic model was closely connected with the incidence of dowry, on the assumption that the bride’s family was expected to pay compensation to the family of a man willing to marry a woman whose status was inferior to his. Hypergamy was also associated by certain British colonial observers to the occurrence of female infanticides, with the practice of dowry acting as a logical connection between the two phenomena. See Veena Talwar Oldenburg, Dowry Murder: The Imperial Origins of a Cultural Crime (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 30.

Classical studies on the Nāyars include Katleen Gough, “Nayar: Central Kerala” and “Nayar: North Kerala,” in Matrilinal Kinship, ed. David M. Schneider and Katleen Gough (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), 298–414; and Christopher J. Fuller, The Nayars Today (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). Obviously the matrimonial customs of Nāyars today are quite different from the ones observed by the early modern Portuguese. I am using the Sanskrit expression Brāhmaṇa(s) to indicate those who in English are known as Brahmins or Brāhmins, in Portuguese as Brumenes, in Spanish as Bramines, and in Italian as Bramini (as well as Brammani in documents pertaining to the Malabar Rites controversy).

38. Fuller, Nayars Today, 4.


48. Dalgado (Glossário, 1:101) explains it as a *preteritum* of the Konkani verb *bātunk*, related to the Marathi *bātne*, coming from the Hindustani *batā*, meaning “difference in exchange” or “allowance” (*trocá* in Portuguese). While Dalgado’s interpretation referred directly to the linguistic use recorded in Goa a century ago, it is interesting to observe that by the end of the nineteenth century the word *bātne*, meaning precisely
“allowance,” was attested also in the Mangalorean variety of Koṭikan. Angelus Francis Xavier Maffei, A Konkani-English Dictionary (Mangalore: Basel Mission Press, 1883), 82.

49. The literature on the Madurai mission and on Nobili is extensive, even though certain fundamental archival sources have not yet been used, such as the ones conserved in the Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede, Vatican City, especially in the manuscript volume S.O., St. St., QQ 1-9. The best scholarly biography of Nobili is still Peter R. Bachmann, Roberto Nobili, 1577–1656: Ein Missionsgeschichtlicher Beitrag zum Christlichen Dialog mit Hinduismus (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Jesu, 1972). Essential to an understanding of the controversy on the Madurai mission is the original and sophisticated analysis Ines G. Županov, Disputed Mission: Jesuit Experiments and Brahmanical Knowledge in Seventeenth-Century India (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999). Based on rich archival documentation, although devoid of precise stated references, is Nobili’s hagiographic biography Augustine Saulière, S.J., His Star in the East, ed. Savarimuthu Rajamanickam, S.J. (Madras: De Nobili Research Institute, 1995). Nobili has drawn renewed attention among scholars in recent times. Particularly important are two volumes of conference proceedings, namely, C. Joe Arun, S.J., ed., Interculturation of Religion: Critical Perspectives on Robert de Nobili’s Mission in India (Bangalore: Asian Trading, 2007); and Matteo Sanfilippo and Carlo Prezzolini, eds., Roberto de Nobili (1577–1656), Missionario Gesuita Poliziano: Atti del Convegno, Montepulciano, 20 Ottobre 2007 (Perugia: Guerra, 2008).


51. The term Parangui, current in the early documents concerning the Madurai mission, was one of the many variations of the Persian Farangi, derived from the Arabic expressions Al-Faranj, Ifranji, and Firanjī, all indicating a Frank. The derogatory connotations associated with this semantic constellation can be perceived easily considering that by the end of the nineteenth century the related Anglo-Indian expression Paranghee was used to indicate “an obstinates chronic disease endemic in Ceylon” that had “a superficial resemblance to syphilis.” Henry Yule and Arthur Coke Burnell, Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical, and Discursive, ed. William Crooke (1886; New Delhi: Rupa, 2002), 352–54, 672.

52. Such a claim was at the origin of the erroneous nineteenth-century attribution to Nobili of a peculiar work, the Ezourvedam, credited previously by Voltaire and other European intellectuals as a genuine Veda and today mostly interpreted as some sort of
eighteenth-century French Jesuit forgery or imitation of the Hindu sacred scriptures. See Ludo Rocher, ed., Ezourvedam: A French Veda of the Eighteenth Century (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1984). A French Jesuit authorship, even though declined according to a series of ingenious hypotheses, has been claimed also in Urs App, The Birth of Orientalism (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010). However, it should be noted that no concrete evidence has been provided until now to disprove the possibility that the Ezourvedam is the fruit of a native Indian agency. On the contrary, the type of religious synthesis displayed by that text is in direct contradiction to the concrete forms with which the Jesuits in Asia articulated their method of accommodatio.

53. Roberto de Nobili, Roberto de Nobili on Indian Customs, ed. Savarimuthu Rajamanickam, S.J. (Palayamkottai, India: De Nobili Research Centre, 1972), 2:113–14; the English translation is mine, as the one made by Jean-Pierre Leonard, S.J., previously archbishop of Madurai, is not always literal.

54. The relevance of the notion of adiaphora in order to understand Nobili’s method was observed for the first time in Ines G. Županov, “Le repli du religieux: Les missionnaires jésuites du 17e siècle entre la théologie chrétienne et une éthique païenne,” Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales 51, no. 6 (1996): 1201–23.

55. The text of the brief can be found in Iuris Pontificii de Propaganda Fide: Pars prima, complectens Bullas Brevia Acta S.S. a Congregationis institutione ad presens iuxta temporis seriem disposita, auspice E.mo ac R.no S.R.E Cardinali Ioanne Simoni S.C. de Propaganda Fide Prefecto, cura ac studio Raphaëlis de Martinis, eiusdem Cong. Consult. et missionis sacerdotis etc. (Rome: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1888–97), 1:15–17. The Latin expression corumbynum was a phonetic approximation of the Tamil kud.umi. The retroflex consonant /d/ was perceived as an alveolar thrill, namely, a sound expressed in Italian by the grapheme /r/. A description and visual representation of the tilakas used by a major constellation in the Hindu world are offered in A. W. Entwistle, “Vaiṣṇaṇa Tilaṅkas: Sectarian Marks Worn by Worshippers of Viṣṇu,” theme issue, IAVRI Bulletin 11–12 (1981–82). As for the baths allowed to the Christians, it has been observed even in contemporary Hinduism that “ritual and profane washing can certainly be done together, as when the believer stands up to his hips in the river water and dives under several times to wash himself. But it is always clearly delineated whether it is a ritual act or not. There is also a linguistic distinction between ritual (mārjana) and ‘profane’ (snāna, śauca) washing” (Axel Michaels, Hinduism: Past and Present [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004; German ed., 1988], 237–38).

56. “Satiusque est cum humilibus respici, quam cum altis a longe cognosci, atque ad modicum tempus huius mundi contemptibilibus aggregari, quam in Æternum cum contemptoribus separari de medio iustorum” (Iuris Pontificii de Propaganda Fide, 1:17).

57. Relatively limited documentation and the persistent clash of denominational claims within the Saint Thomas Christian community hinder the achievement of a scholarly consensus on the earliest history of this ancient and diversified community. Useful for a first approach to the topic is still Leslie Brown, The Indian Christians of St. Thomas: An Account of the Ancient Syrian Church of Malabar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982 [1956]).


63. For this reason it is difficult to agree with the conclusion drawn by Sanjay Subrahmanyam in his article "Dom Frei Aleixo de Meneses (1559–1617) et l'echec des tentatives d'indigénisation du christianisme en Inde,” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 43, no. 103 (1998): 21–42. The author proposes a convincing reading of the political motivations that led Meneses to convene the Synod of Diamper, but it is not clear in which sense this would have also represented, as stated in the very title of the essay, “a setback [échec] of the efforts to indigenize Christianity in India.” The liturgy of the Saint Thomas Christians was Eastern Syriac, not Indian, and their bishops had always been sent from the patriarch of the Church of the East, settled initially in Persia and then in Mesopotamia. Subrahmanyam conflates two different processes, namely, the latinization of a church with a Syriac tradition and the repression of the Saint Thomas Christians’ social adaptation to the Malabar context. While the first process indeed took place, the second one was neither desired nor achieved by Meneses, as the canon on the discrimination against low-caste Christians clearly demonstrates.


67. Gouvea, *Iornada*, 69v: “Se desterraram muytos outros custumes barbaros perjudiciaes, & impertinentes, tirando hum . . . posto q[ue] os Christãos entendão q[ue] isto he vaidade, & superstição, cõ tudo o guardião.” The adjective *impertinentes* has a wide semantic field and indicates fastidiousness, excessive curiosity, and annoyance. However, in an early modern context it also had further technical meanings. In moral theology *circunstacias impertinentes* were circumstances that, by neither increasing nor decreasing the moral responsibility in a sin, were not supposed to be declared during
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sacramental confession. A typical case was whether the woman with whom a man had “offended God” was beautiful or ugly. See Rafael Bluteau, C.R., Vocabulario Portuguez e Latino (Coimbra: Collegio das Artes da Companhia de Jesu, 1713), 470. Considering that Gouvea was an ecclesiastical author, it seems reasonable to imagine that his use of the word *impertinente* was influenced by his theological education and that, in qualifying the customs of caste segregation, he wanted to stress that they were also “irrelevant” and not important.

68. We have already seen (n. 64) how the Synod of Diamper did not represent the end of the indigenization and adaptation of the Christianity of Saint Thomas Christians to the social and cultural conditions of Malabar. As for Goa, certain scholars of an older generation failed to acknowledge that the evangelization process did not necessarily imply, everywhere and at all times, a whitewashing of the local social and cultural heritage. A typical example of such an unbalanced interpretation is provided in Anant Kakba Priolkar, *The Goa Inquisition: Being a Quatercentenary Commemoration Study of the Inquisition in India* (Bombay: Bombay University Press, 1961). The author does not limit himself to sketching the history of the Goa Inquisition but also provides a representation of the overall conversion process in Goa that totally ignores the relevance of native agency in the adoption of the religion brought by the Portuguese.


71. Francisco Laines, *Defensio Indicarum Missionum* (Rome: Ex Typographia Reverendae Cameræ Apostolicae, 1707), 67–68. As I show in my doctoral dissertation, this book was printed in a clandestine way and with a false indication of place. On the basis of formal and historical grounds I identify the real printer of this work with António Pedrozo Galrão, who published in Lisbon both authorized and counterfeited editions.

A clandestine publication can explain why just five exemplars of the *Defensio* seem to have been conserved in research libraries throughout the world. Three are in Rome: one in the Biblioteca Casanatense and two in the library of the Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu. Another copy is in the Biblioteca Universitaria di Genova, and the fifth is conserved in the Library of the University of Michigan.

72. It is remarkable that Laines differentiated the two aspects of “caste” in his Latin translation. The notion of *jāti* was rendered by *tribus* (tribe, as in the case of the tribes of Israel or the tribes of the ancient Romans), whereas the different concept of *varṇa* was expressed very aptly by *ordo* (order, rank), hinting precisely at a univocal system of indexing and ranking. On the difference between *jāti* and *varṇa*, see Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, 72–75.


74. With the expression “cultural cross-dressing” a concept is extended and generalized from gender studies to the analysis of intercultural encounters. From a gender
perspective, “cross dressing is a simple term for a complex set of phenomena. It ranges from simply wearing one or two items of clothing to full-scale burlesque, from a comic impersonation to a serious attempt to pass as the opposite gender, from an occasional desire to experiment with gender identity to attempting to live most of one’s life as a member of the opposite sex” (Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993], vii). More generally, “cross-dressing implies an act in which one consciously and for a period of time takes on a particular form of dress,” not necessarily one pertaining to a gender different from one’s own. Hence, “the term cultural cross-dressing . . . conveys a sense of freedom from boundaries . . . One can bend gender roles but also cultural roles” (Inge E. Boer, Uncertain Territories: Boundaries in Cultural Analysis, ed. Mieke Bal, Bregie van Eekelen, and Patricia Spyer [Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006], 143).


77. António Vasconcellos de Saldanha, De Kangxi para o Papa pela via de Portugal: Memoria e Documentos relativos à intervenção de Portugal e da Companhia de Jesus na questão dos Ritos Chineses e nas relações entre o Imperador Kangxi e a Santa Sé (Macao: Instituto Português do Oriente, 2002), 1:382–83.


82. More precisely, the current Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität is the direct heir of the previous University of Ingolstadt, established in 1472 and then significantly influenced by the Jesuits until the suppression of the Society of Jesus. See Carl Prantl, Geschichte der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Ingolstadt, Landshut, München, zur Festfeier ihres Vierhundertjährigen Bestehens im Auftrage des Akademischen Senates (Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1872), 1:219. The College of Ingolstadt, an educational institution complementary to the local university, was fully owned by the Jesuits. The Jesuit professors of the university were also members of the college. In this sense it is
possible to say that the Jesuit College of Ingolstadt is part of the inheritance acquired by Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München.

83. Another critical voice was that of Claude de Visdelou (1656–1737), a former missionary to China and then bishop and apostolic vicar on behalf of Propaganda Fide. If Visdelou was an eminent Sinologist, he did not display a special interest in Indian religions and societies. Furthermore, once exiled from China to the French settlement of Pondichéry, he refused to live with the Jesuits, preferring to stay with the French Capuchins. See Ángel Santos Hernández, S.J., Jesuitas y Obispados, vol. 2 (Madrid: Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2000), 157–62.


87. The papal decision was taken on January 5, 1741. The Latin minutes stated that “S[n]ct[i]tas Sua addidit iniungendum eid[em] P[atri] Renato [= Fr. René de Charente, general custodian of the Capuchins in India], cæterisque ipsius Socijs Missionarijs ut eos, qui Baptismum susceperint, adducere studeant ad credendum Parreas non esse genus hominum reproborum, et æternæ Beatitudinis incapaces, sed animas eorum ab animabus nobilium non esse dissimilæs, quamvis hoc dissimilitudinem non auferat, quæ inter unum, et alium coetum personarum reperitur in ordine Civili, seu Politico” (S.O., St. St., QQ 1-n, f. 399v [virtual numbering], Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede, Vatican City). This Fr. René de Charente should not be confused with a previous Capuchin missionary working in Madras in the early eighteenth century, namely, Fr. René d’Angoulême. While most sources do not mention Charente as the origin of the second Fr. René, this information is provided in a legal printed document, the “Mémoire pour le sieur Cotterel, Capitaine des Vaisseaux de la Compagnie des Indes, navigateurs d’Inde en Inde, contre la Compagnie des Indes,” in Plaidoyers et Mémoires, contenant des questions intéressantes, tant en matieres Civiles, Canones, & Criminelles, que de Police, & de Comerce, avec les Jugemens, & leur motifs sommaires, & plusieurs Discours sur differentes matieres, soit de droit public, soit d’histoire, par M. Mannory, ancien Avocat au Parlement (Paris: Chez Claude Herissant, Libraire-Imprimeur, rue Neuve Notre-Dame, à la Croix d’or, 1755), 16:71.

88. Cod. Ital. 101, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich. It is possible that even this manuscript once belonged to the Jesuit College of Ingolstadt.

89. Crucial for the identification is the list of credentials and patent letters granted to the “Indian” and actually known to be given to Manci by Fr. António Dias, provincial of Malabar. Ibid., ff. 6r–7r.
90. Ibid., ff. iv, 2r.
91. Ibid., f. 4r.
92. The expression is very common even in modern Italian, while its first literary attestation (“Vedete comèi fan ben l’Indiano?”) seems to be found in a comedy written in 1618 by Michelangelo Buonarroti il Giovane (1568–1646), nephew of the famous Renaissance artist. See La Fiera Commedia di Michelagnolo Buonarruoti il Giovane e La Tancia Commedia Rusticale del Medesimo coll’annotazioni dell’Abate Anton Maria Salvini Gentiluomo Fiorentino e Lettor delle Lettere Greche nello Studio Fiorentino (Florence: Nella Stamperia di S. A. R. Per li Tartini e Franchi, 1726), 222 (Quarta Giornata, act 3, scene 9). The Indians hinted at in this Italian expression were actually the American natives, perceived stereotypically as dreamy and abstracted. Addolorata Landi, “A proposito della locuzione italiana fare talbanese,” Zeitschrift für Balkanologie 35, no. 1 (1999): 42–45, specifically 42–43.
93. The text can be easily consulted in Iuris Pontificii de Propaganda Fide, 3:167–82. Incidentally, it should be noted that no real contribution to the papal condemnation of the Malabar Rites was provided by the French Capuchin Norbert Bar-le-Duc (1703–1769). This friar used the Malabar Rites as a way to slander the entire Society of Jesus and had very limited knowledge of the concrete conditions in the Indian missions. I have analyzed this figure in my essay “Les meilleures Causes embarassent les Juges, si elles manquent de bonnes preuves: Père Norbert’s Militant Historiography on the Malabar Rites Controversy,” in Europäische Geschichtskulturen um 1700 zwischen Gelehrsamkeit, Politik und Konfession, ed. Thomas Wallnig, Thomas Stockinger, Ines Peper, and Patrick Fiska (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 239–68.