

The most unique aspect of this compendium of essays is that it offers a very fine example of how a Christian denomination can challenge its treasured ecclesial traditions as a way to move toward reconciliation, wholeness, and justice. Indeed “this book contributes Catholic voice to the literature of preaching about race” (xiii), and it does so effectively. *Preaching Racial Justice* is an unapologetic challenge by Roman Catholic laity and clergy not only to Roman Catholic preachers in the United States, but all preachers will be both confronted and enriched.

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*India's Nonviolent Freedom Struggle: The Thomas Christians (1599–1799)*. By Clara A. B. Joseph. New York: Routledge, 2024. xvi + 164 pages. \$180.00.  
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Thomas Christians in India trace their historical origins back to Saint Thomas the Apostle. According to tradition, Thomas came to Kerala (southwest India) in 52 CE and founded churches along the Malabar coast until his martyrdom in Chennai (southeast India) in 72 CE. Organized in the ancient Syriac Christian tradition and flourishing long before European colonial efforts in India, the Thomas Christians are essential for understanding the history of Christianity in India. In this important book, Clara A. B. Joseph examines the ways Thomas Christians resisted colonialism and were integral to the nonviolent freedom struggle in India.

Joseph begins in the sixteenth century with the Synod of Diamper (1599). This synod placed the Thomas Christians under the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. While scholarship has focused on the ecclesiastical and liturgical implications of the synod, Joseph argues persuasively that the colonial context of the synod cannot be ignored and that the synod was a Machiavellian “weapon of colonization” (37) aiming for complete domination. Because of Thomas Christians’ economic and military power in India, their ecclesiastical control also meant the control of their spice trade and army. As a result, Thomas Christian resistance to ecclesiastical policies (using nonviolent means such as noncooperation) was, therefore, anticolonial in nature.

The characterization of Thomas Christians as Nestorian “heretics” was used to maintain both ecclesiastical and colonial power in the seventeenth century. Joseph reassesses the Coonan Cross Oath of 1653, where Thomas Christians vowed resistance to the Latin (Jesuit) priests. Given the political

and economic ties of the Jesuits in the seventeenth century, Joseph argues that the oath was not an isolated incident but a part of an ongoing nonviolent struggle by Thomas Christians against India's colonization. That ongoing struggle included seeking alternative trade markets outside colonial control and conducting unauthorized ordinations.

Finally, Joseph turns to the eighteenth century and examines the *Varthamanappusthakam*, a Malayalam travelogue detailing the trip of a Thomas Christian delegation to Rome. The narrative recounts colonial racism as well as the ways Thomas Christians responded to that racism through strategic counter-discourse, calls for unity, and arguments for self-rule. The travelogue itself became a tool for promoting colonial resistance and national unity among its readers.

Joseph offers a crucial corrective to scholarship of the period, highlighting the ways the entanglement of church and crown require any study of early modern Christianity to examine carefully the ways "church matters" inevitably were also colonial matters. She also troubles the persistent binary of Christian West versus Non-Christian East. She dispels misunderstandings about Thomas Christians and makes a case for their significance to India's struggle for independence. In doing so, she demonstrates that nonviolent resistance to colonization and the work for self-rule in India are older and more diverse than normally stipulated. The history of Thomas Christians shows the very real ways Christianity cannot be necessarily conflated with colonialism. However, the ongoing narrative that equates all of Christianity with conversion and colonialism persists. This has had deadly consequences for Indian Christians, as Joseph details in her conclusion.

Joseph is to be commended for this excellent historical, cultural, and literary study of the Thomas Christians in the early modern period. Her analysis offers key insights for anyone interested in the history of Christianity, Indian Christianity, nonviolence, and/or postcolonial, decolonial, and subaltern studies.

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*Spirituality for the Godless: Buddhism, Humanism, and Religion.* By Michael McGhee. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. x + 200 pages. \$30.99 (paper).

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