

*Envoys of a Human God: The Jesuit Mission to Christian Ethiopia, 1557–1632.*  
Andreu Martínez d'Alós-Moner.

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This is the first comprehensive English-language account of the best-documented case of early modern missionaryism in sub-Saharan Africa: the Jesuit mission to Ethiopia. Whereas in recent decades the topic has received the attention of many scholars, none of the extant accounts, save for Hervé Pennec's French-language monograph, can be compared in terms of comprehensiveness and depth of analysis to Martínez's.

The volume is chronologically divided into three parts. Part 1 contextualizes the making of the mission in relation to previous Ethiopian-European exchanges and the myth of Prester John (chapter 1), Portuguese-Ethiopian relations (chapter 2), and the rise of the Estado da Índia (chapter 3). Part 2 dissects the mission's organization and demographics (chapter 4), its theological underpinnings and practical strategies (chapter 5), and its cultural byproducts (chapter 6). Part 3 examines the mission's climax and collapse in the 1620s and 1630s (chapter 7) and its legacy (chapter 8).

Among the author's many cogent contentions and merits, three stand out. First, the society's experience in India had a profound bearing on the mission: the author successfully frames the mission in the wider world of the Society of Jesus's global endeavor and offers a stimulating analysis of the cultural transfer from India to Ethiopia. Second, while past historiography has traditionally focused on the idiosyncrasies of a few Jesuit personalities, Martínez convincingly emphasizes structure and contingency. Hence he replaces the traditional contraposition between the successful accommodationism of Pedro Pàez (head of the mission from 1603 to 1619) and Afonso Mendes's failed intransigent leadership (1625–32) with an approach that explains successes and failures as the structural products of different missionary stages. In this perspective, Pàez's success resulted from a phase of timid "observation" that was mostly accepted by Ethiopians. To the contrary, once the fathers had entrenched themselves at court and in the countryside it was natural for António Fernandes (whose leadership between 1619 and 1625 has mostly been ignored by other scholars), and later Mendes, to move on to policies of "deconstruction" and "conversion" (148–49) that inevitably sparked widespread Ethiopian resistance and led to the mission's demise.

Third, whereas the vast body of published Jesuit sources has induced most scholars of the mission to look no further, Martínez decided to leave no stone unturned and engaged in both archival work at multiple locations in Portugal, Italy, and Spain, as well as fieldwork in Ethiopia.

It would be strange for a volume of this scope to have no drawbacks. The exposition at times is interrupted by somewhat pedantic historiographical reviews that confer to the volume a dissertation-like tone and that should have been confined to footnotes or the introduction, if included at all. Some choices relating to the volume's organization are somewhat odd: in particular, packing the almost 200 pages of part 2 in three chapters of dubious coherence and adopting chapter titles that are not always representative of the content. The most glaring example is the chapter on the mission's culture that ends with an unrelated section on the mission's finances. Overall, the uneven style and organization suggest subpar editorial and publishing practices that are all the more disappointing in light of the staggering price Brill charges for the volume.

These minor flaws, which are only in small part imputable to the author, do not take away from what is a monumental achievement. The volume is bound to become required reading for specialists of the Horn of Africa's missionary history, and of the Society of Jesus. Furthermore, because of the original framing of the mission in the larger world of the society's endeavors in Asia and the rise and demise of the *Estado da Índia*, the volume will attract considerable interest among Indian Ocean specialists. Lastly, the volume's encyclopedic character, the generous bibliography, its noteworthy appendixes dedicated to the genealogy of the Ethiopian royal house, and the demographics of the Jesuits in Ethiopia and their intellectual production are likely to make it an appealing reference work for scholars in other fields.

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