**Roberto de Nobili, Preaching Wisdom to the Three Treatises, translated and introduced by Anand Amaladass and Francis X. Cloony, St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2000, pp.xxi+345**.

The author of this work, Roberto de Nobili, was born in Rome, several centuries ego, in 1577. He arrived in Goa, the Capital of the then Portuguese India, in 1605 as a Jesuit priest and missionary. From there he traveled southward and settled himself down in Madurai from 1606 where a fellow Jesuit was already working He learnt Sanskrit, the Indian classical language, and Tamil, the local language, with a view to study and understand the Indian religious and literary works from original sources. He also changed his dress, diet and life style to conform to that of a Hindu sannyasi (renunciant).

He used his learning and life style to establish contacts with the Hindu intelligentsia and win converts. He wrote the Dialogue on Eternal Life and Inquiry into the Meaning of God in Tamil. Both these are translated and reproduced in this book. In the Dialogue on Eternal Life, which is believed to be among de Nobili's earliest writings in Tamil, the author tries to apply theological premises, mainly Thomistic, to the new context of South Indian religion and culture. He tries to argue from available data that the majority of the tenets of Hindu religion does not meet the test of a rationally plausible and morally edifying religion. Though he was very syrnpathetic to many of the cultural attitudes and social customs of India, his Dialogue does not reflect a sympathetic attitude to Hindu religion. His other work in Tamil, which is reproduced in the book, namely, Inquiry into the Meaning of God, is a shorter one and is striking for a polemic even more relentless than the previous work.

Christian sources indicate that he impressed many Hindus and had a fair amount of success in winning many over to the Gospel (p.21). However, the approach taken in the Dialogue and Inquiry must have also gained him many enemies especially from the devotees of Vishnu, Rama and Krishna.

However, de Nobili had a positive attitude toward Indian culture as a Whole. In the Report Concerning Certain Customs of the Indian Nation, written in Latin, the translation of which, is reproduced here, he explains the crucial distinction between religion and culture, and argues for a distinction between the essentials of Christian faith and the cultural trappings of European Christianity.

He contended that the infant Church in the Rohnan Empire had adapted much of their pagan customs. This was followed in other countries too. Hence, he points out: "one cannot understand why India should be dealt with more severely than the other countries..." (p.214). Instead, "great is the urgency of allowing the people of India to live according to the social traditions of their forefathers..." (p.217).

It should be noted that from the beginning other missionaries had doubts about de Nobili's positive attitude toward Indian culture. This became so heated and intense at one point that he had to defend himself from his critics. Three Latin treatises articulate the rationale of his missionary theory. They are: a) A Response to the objections which have been raised against the method which the new Madurai mission uses for converting the natives, b) A narration of the foundations on which the Madurai mission was founded and on which it stands, c) Report on certain customs of the Indian nation. Only the last mentioned is reproduced in this book.

The Report, Dialogue and Inquiry represent only a portion Of de Nobili's literary legacy. But they give us an idea of the mental vigour with which he encountered the Indian cultural, social and religious world. At the same time, they also show the limits of his understanding as well as the lack of empathy with the Hindu religious categories.

The two Tamil works Dialogue and Inquiry starts from the conviction that his position had to be right and the local Hindu position whenever contrary  to his theory to be wrong. There is no evidence of some deep empathy with any of the myths, texts or practices he encountered. The local texts and testimonies seem to be used merely as a strategy to put his points across,

In his view India was richly endowed with admirable social custom, a fine legal system and impressive philosophical theories. But these sound foundations, according to him, are superimposed with erroneous religious beliefs and practices. He reasoned that one must carefully sort out the cultural elements from superstitious and idolatrous religious practices. While others saw the socio-cultural religious ideas and practices as deeply interrelated, he saw them as easily separable.

His intention was primarily to win over the learned Hindus, who he thought would become allies against the inconsistencies and absurdities of popular, traditional Hindu beliefs. In the end he does not seem to have made any real breakthrough. No tradition embodying de Nobili's methods flourished after his death. However, de Nobili occupies an important place as a pioneer in the history Of Indian Christian mission. He was one of the first Europeans to study seriously the Indian culture, religion and languages, even as he grappled with the vastly differñg Indian religious and social context. Whatever be our assessment of the missionary effectiveness of de Nobili's theories and methods, his writings merit careful study.

The book contains an excellent  a brief biographical sketch, an over view Of the three works and a critical assessment of his life and ministry by two Jesuits, one from India, Anand Amaladass and another from America, Francis X. Cloony.

Preaching Wisdom to the Wise is a timely gift especially to Indologists, scholars of religion and missiologists.

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