

Andrew C. ROSS, *A Vision Betrayed: The Jesuits in Japan and China, 1542–1742*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994. xvii + 216 pp. No price listed. ISBN 0-88344-991-9.

ANDREW ROSS gives in his *A Vision Betrayed* a comprehensive account of the Jesuit ventures in Japan and China between 1542 and 1742. Although the Jesuits ultimately failed to build a lasting presence in both countries, Ross blames outside forces such as decisions by various Japanese political leaders in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and the “Rites Controversy” in China for the demise of the early Jesuit missions in these countries. Ross asserts that the Jesuits themselves were successful when they were in charge. Concerning the Jesuit presence in Japan, Ross writes:

Was Christianity rejected by the Japanese, as is so often stated? No, the Jesuit mission was not a failure and the Japanese people did not reject Christianity. Indeed, one can go further and say that [it]...was one of the most successful in the history of Christianity. Where or when have Christian missionaries in less than one hundred years produced a Christian community of approaching half a million people in a culture already technically advanced and literate? In the pre-Constantinian Roman Empire perhaps, but nowhere else. (pp. 115–16)

As evidence that Christianity had a real impact on some Japanese, he cites the deep faith of the Shimabara rebels in 1637.

The key to Jesuit success, Ross argues, was indigenization and adaptation. Francis Xavier, who arrived in Japan in 1549, insisted that his missionaries should respect and understand Japanese culture. His successor, Alessandro Valignano, further developed this approach in Japan and in China, where Jesuits such as Matteo Ricci and Adam Schall von Bell gained Confucian scholar status and even became key figures in the Chinese civil service.

In sharp contrast to the Jesuit worldview, by the sixteenth century, Ross notes, the Church in the West and on the Iberian Peninsula in particular had developed an inflexible Europeanist stance—that “the European experience is the Christian experience and is definitive for all humanity” (p. xv). The Church in several European countries such as Spain and Portugal was under the authority of the imperial government and was used as a vehicle of conquest of various native peoples.

The Jesuit response to Europeanism in China and Japan, notes Ross, was to “insist that it was better to spread the Christian faith in a situation as free as possible from any relation to Portuguese or Spanish imperial authority. The issue is, however, that in Japan and China the Jesuits went much further than that and tried to integrate Christianity and the indigenous culture so that there developed a pattern of Christian life which was Chinese or Japanese and not a replication of European Christianity” (p. 204).

One sees the successful indigenization of the Christian church in many Asian or African cultures this century, and the Japanese Buddhist group Sōka Gakkai has successfully built indigenous chapters around the world in recent years. Western Christianity, however, failed to support similar attempts by the Jesuits four centuries ago. Clearly the Jesuits were working too far ahead of their time.

Ross presents a detailed and scholarly study of the Jesuits, their history and personnel. He has made excellent use of Western source material on the Jesuits and Christianity of the period. His studies of the careers of such Jesuits as Valignano and Ricci are exemplary and are a very good reason for the scholar to treasure this work. His critical analysis of earlier studies of the Jesuits is helpful to any scholar.

There are, however, certain real problems with Ross’s work that detract from its value to scholars of Asian religions. Professor Ross has little training in Asian studies and does not have a deep understanding of Japanese and Chinese history, culture, and religion. His presentation of the political history of China and Japan in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries is adequate, but he fails to give a sufficient analysis of why the events covered occurred. He also states that there may have been as many as a half-million converts to Christianity in both countries bridging all social classes, but he fails to explain in detail who these converts were, why they were attracted to Christianity, and why they joined the new faith.

Ross’s failure to truly appreciate the cultures of Japan and China is understandable from the source material listed in the bibliography. There are no Japanese- or Chinese-language sources or Western-language translations of

native source material. He does refer to such standard works as Joseph Kitagawa's *Religion in Japanese History*, but these are generalist works that provide little in-depth analysis. There is passing reference to Endō Shūsaku's novel *Silence*, but no mention of it in the notes and bibliography and no attempt to deal with the various issues raised by Endō in his novel.

Ross's *A Vision Betrayed* is, in short, an excellent study of the aims and actions of the leading Jesuits in East Asia between 1542 and 1742 from a Western perspective. On the other hand, he fails to provide any meaningful Japanese or Chinese perspectives beyond the thoughts and actions of certain national leaders such as Hideyoshi Toyotomi and the Kangxi Emperor. An Asianist must turn elsewhere to find answers to these questions.

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