

a second quibble, while the author denies a causal role for religion, in some of his book's accounts religious understandings were said to motivate specific acts of violence. My major concern was the author's treatment of the relevant literature. In a theory chapter titled "Religious Violence?", Duncan locates his study alongside the work of Gerry van Klinken, Jacques Bertrand and others whose accounts downplay the role of religion in violence. While perhaps fair, he then shifts to theories of remembering, neglecting to engage with literature that speaks to the core focus of the book. The reader may immediately think of work by Stanley Tambiah, Hans Kippenburg, Mark Juergensmeyer or Michael Jerryson. Much later in the book, these authors do appear, and their ideas shape Duncan's conclusions. The engagement with theories of religion and violence would have been far more effective if those theories had been addressed earlier and more directly.

In concluding, Duncan notes that "Although religion may not have been a causal factor in the conflict, it became the defining one over time as the conflict narrative changed" (p. 172). This is the essence of the book, moving beyond essentialism in discussing the ways in which religion matters for those who experience violent conflict. *Violence and Vengeance* succeeds brilliantly in accomplishing this important task.

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*Conflict and Conversion: Catholicism in Southeast Asia, 1500–1700.*  
By Tara Alberts. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. xvii+  
242 pp.

There is much to like in this interesting new book, which looks at the efforts of Catholic missionaries in the early modern period in Melaka, Siam and two areas of what is now Vietnam. Alberts is

widely read not only on Catholics in Asia, but also on missionary work, conversions and the Church generally, and the histories of the three areas treated. As she notes, Southeast Asia is a good place to test general theories about conversion, and the factors that are most important to that process (p. 205).

Alberts is frank about the problems that she faced in writing a study of this sort, given the sources that she inevitably had to use. The sources are virtually all from European missionaries or European travellers. Yet much of the action was undertaken by local people — those who converted and also those who converted others. These people remain silent in Alberts' sources. What it meant to convert is thus filtered through the triumphalist accounts of missionaries.

A familiar theme in all such studies is the matter of accommodation: how completely must the convert renounce his or her past religious, and even social, practices? This question applies of course to China and India as much as to Southeast Asia. Alberts puts it like this:

[It was] the problem of the legitimate extent of accommodation: how far missionaries and their converts could change the traditional behaviours and cultural accoutrements of Catholic belief and practice before orthodoxy was compromised and the convert ceased to deserve the title. (p. 203)

Another much studied theme is the rather ungodly competition between the various religious orders and state-aligned missionaries. Missionaries constantly competed with and criticized one another and other orders. In Part I of the book, Chapters One and Two detail these “turf wars” over who was to control missionary efforts in different areas. These jurisdictional disputes gravely hampered the conversion effort. In addition, a lack of priests, let alone bishops, meant that an initial conversion or at least expression of interest often could not be followed up on. This factor hindered the imposition of orthodoxy as represented by the Tridentine norms of Counter-Reformation Catholicism.

Chapter Three is perhaps the most interesting part of this monograph. It describes the “conversion potential” (p. 47) of the three areas under discussion. Melaka was unfavourable. Islam was too well entrenched; it also was very flexible, accommodating and

resilient. In Siam the problem was not hostility but rather indifference from local people. Their religious needs were well met by Buddhism, which in turn was helped by the extensive patronage of Siam's king. Quite different was the experience in Tonkin and Cochin China, where substantial gains were made. This was not really to do with the "nature" of local people, but rather with the fact that these areas, unlike Siam, were in a state of turmoil during the period in question, both religiously and politically. There was massive social dislocation and change. This is, of course, a familiar theme in studies of new religions and conversions in general.

Chapters Four and Five in Part II of the volume study missionary methods. There were debates over what to wear, whether missionaries should try to appear poor and whether big churches were better than small ones. As in China, a knowledge of mathematics and also of Western medical techniques turned out to be very useful "in presenting an appearance of scholarship and erudition" (p. 105).

Chapter Five covers tools of evangelism — that is, what was done to secure thorough conversions rather than mere surface changes in religious practice. Hosts of written guides were produced to facilitate such conversions. However, as we find out in Part III, "Converts to Christianity", what worked best were spiritual services offered to desperate people and communities hoping for a miracle. Chapter Six concentrates on baptism, penance and the Eucharist and on the ways in which they were taught and modified in the three areas under discussion. As examples, how one translated the essence of baptism into local languages, who could administer it, how much an adult needed to know before being accepted into the Church and the question of mass baptisms were all issues that missionaries must address. Alberts details the vigorous controversies over these matters and others, and also the ways in which these fundamental matters related to existing religious and social norms in Southeast Asia.

Chapter Seven deals with Catholic devotions and shows "how European and Southeast Asian religious cultures could meet, interact, and collide" (p. 146). Devotions included processions, images and the rosary. For example, the Virgin fitted in with existing images and ideals of female saviours and goddesses. Similarly, the rosary tied in easily with the prayer beads already common in Southeast Asia.

Alberts is well informed on the role of Southeast Asians themselves in interpreting the faith and developing devotions. Something that I missed here is a discussion of priestly practices that would have seemed strange, or even repulsive, to many local people. The best example is flagellation and “discipline”, which Francis Xavier, to cite a prominent practitioner, undertook with much enthusiasm.

The book closes with a chapter on the role of women in European Catholicism and its modification in Southeast Asia and one on slavery, quite acceptable in the region but posing particular challenges for missionaries. A strong conclusion reiterates the main themes of the book.

This is an excellent example of a successful transition from a doctoral dissertation to a book that should have wide appeal amongst those working on conversions in general, not just in Asia, but also to scholars of the three areas treated. What would be an excellent complement would be a parallel study of Islamic missionary work in insular Southeast Asia, if only because the process of Islamization was much more successful than Christianization. So many of the themes that Alberts mentions can be found in the Muslim effort, such as the matter of accommodation and amusing denunciations from the heartland of Islam concerning the lax practice of Southeast Asians who claimed to be Muslims. Alberts cites various studies on conversion to Islam, but maybe someday we will get a focussed comparative study, one which — from the Christian side — would necessarily draw heavily on Dr Alberts’ excellent book.

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*Gambling with the Land: The Contemporary Evolution of Southeast Asian Agriculture.* Rodolphe De Koninck and Jean-François Rousseau. Singapore: NUS Press, 2012. xvi+189 pp.

A learned, stimulating and yet puzzling book, *Gambling with the Land* comprises nine chapters. All but its introductory and concluding