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Western practices and Indian reflections (15th-17th
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Bruno Restif

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In the published version, the footnotes are placed after the text, p. 164-167.

As odd as it may seem, the history of prayer is a new theme of study in Western historiography¹. There are a few remarkable exceptions however, an outstanding one being the French *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, by Henri Brémond, written at the turn of the 20th century². Nevertheless, it is rather a history of spirituality constructed from spiritual writings, that is why it would be problematic to consider it as a history of the act of praying. This very question, because of its historical importance, is marginally dealt with in some studies focussing on other subjects. But the act of praying proper has only been recently considered as an object of historical study. If we take the example of France, a country that plays a significant role in Western historiography, the construction of prayer as an object of history was made visible only in 1998/2000, by the publication of the thesis of Monique Brulin and of a special issue of the *Revue de l'histoire des religions*³. In these publications, the act of prayer is mainly seen as a vocal act. However, the body is mobilized by the act of prayer, and that is why the use of the body in this context needs to be interrogated. This must allow to establish a link between the new history of prayer and the history of the body, which is a major and thriving field of research in Western historiographies. But this field of research is fragmented into so many branches (medicine, sexuality, sports, beauty standards, etc.) which are loosely connected, moreover the question of the use of the body in the act of prayer remains rather unexplored⁴.

In order to properly focus on this issue, the first problem that arises is [p. 151] that of the sources, needless to say that no history is possible without sources. Being used to working first on written sources, Western historians may initially be at a loss on this question of the use of the body in prayer, because written sources are generally of little avail on the subject. On the contrary, iconographical sources provide a great quantity of information. But when European universities got structured in the 19th century, and tasks were distributed, the study of iconographic sources fell to art historians, while written sources were studied by historians. As art historians concerned themselves only with strictly artistic issues, a study on the body in prayer was not thinkable. In the seventies – here we must say that France played an important part thanks to “l'École des Annales”, from the name of an influential review –, historians started working on pictures as visual sources and images as material. Compared to texts, the different types of images were being raised to a similar status, the new validity of iconographic materials made this visual turn possible. In addition, from the eighties on, this interest in iconography spurred a new history of images and pictures, later called “visual history” ; it started developing in the nineties and the years 2000 with historians and art

¹ I thank Cheikh Sakho for his help, as well as Pierre-Antoine Fabre, Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat and Vasundhara Filliozat for the information they gave me.

² Henri Brémond, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France, depuis la fin des guerres de Religion jusqu'à nos jours*, Paris, Bloud et Gay, 11 vol., 1916-1933.

³ Monique Brulin, *Le Verbe et la voix. La manifestation vocale dans le culte en France au XVII^e siècle*, Paris, Beauchesne, 1998 ; *La Prière dans le christianisme moderne*, special issue of the *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, vol. 217, n° 3, 2000.

⁴ Alain Corbin, Jean-Jacques Courtine and Georges Vigarello (dir.), *Histoire du corps*, Paris, Seuil, 3 vol., 2005-2011.

historians often having to work together on the same subjects, which now tends to blur previously clear-cut boundaries⁵. This new visual history has gradually taken in questions previously pertaining to anthropological studies and taken up early-modern times theological issues⁶. These recent developments lead us to duplicate the question of the body in prayer within pictorial representations into the question of the body in prayer in front of representations. As to this last point, the difficulty lies in the fact that sources are considerably scattered.

Lastly, I intend to establish some connecting articulation between this new Western research and the questions posed by missionary action in India during the 16th and 17th centuries. The history of Christianity in India has for a long time developed along two lines : mission history, concerned with general missionary undertakings, their success or failure, and, on the other hand, the institutional history of Churches (including that of Syrian Christians). From the seventies on, there developed a socio-cultural history of the Christian people in India, which was followed by many studies on areas of particular controversy, with a markedly social and political bias⁷. As far as I am concerned, I shall deal with the visual and corporal aspects of the religious and cultural encounters between Western Catholicism and the main religions of India, i. e. Islam and Hinduism⁸.

1 : Representing the body in prayer, in Western Europe

The 15th and early 16th century Europe, a period characterized by the cultural and artistic phenomenon known as the Renaissance, witnessed an intense [*p. 152*] development of all sorts of pictorial productions, namely painting on canvas, wood and manuscripts. The great bulk of these essentially religious works are commissioned. These commissions originate from religious institutions, or by individual church members or private donors from the nobility or the high bourgeoisie. These individual sponsors, sometimes called “donors” in the historiography, have their likeness / portrait taken in prayer in many a religious painting. This type of commission is not to be taken as an art commission in the current Western acceptance, but rather as an act of faith performed in the hope of some religious retribution, this is reinforced by the posture of the sponsor in prayer.

This type of representation underscores the fact that the commissioned work is a form of a prayer from the sponsor to the Virgin Mary or to Christ, the proof of the prayer being the painting. This can be exemplified in the Melun diptych (circa A.D. 1450), by the French painter Jean Fouquet, commissioned by Étienne Chevalier, who is seen on the left-hand panel⁹. This is a well-known painting because Fouquet was by then the leading French painter, and because Étienne Chevalier was Treasurer of the King of France and member of the Privy Council. The painting was intended for Melun collegiate church, near Paris, and specifically the Chapel of the Virgin, where a regular Mass ceremony was founded, and where Chevalier had his grave placed and a statue of the Virgin erected. Here Chevalier is

⁵ See for example David Freedberg and Jan de Vries (ed.), *Art in history, History in art. Studies in Seventeenth-Century Dutch culture*, Santa Monica, The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1991.

⁶ David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989 ; Hans Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft*, Munich, Wilhelm Fink, 2001.

⁷ John C.B. Webster, *Historiography of Christianity in India*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012.

⁸ I do not intend to hint that Christianity is not a religion of India (see on this matter Rowena Robinson, *Christians of India*, New Delhi / London, Sage Publications, 2003), but to study the cultural aspects of the encounters between Western Catholicism and the main non-Christian religions of India (the case of the Syrian Christians is not dealt with).

⁹ Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, and Antwerpen, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten. See <http://www.smb-digital.de> and <http://www.opac-fabritius.be>. See also the web gallery of (European) art : <http://www.wga.hu>.

portrayed in prayer, clasped hands at chest level ; it may be guessed that he is kneeling if we compare his posture to the other character's. The presentation is made by his patron St Étienne (Stephen), after whom he is named – patron who appears as the instrument of mediation by presenting him to the Madonna and Child depicted on the right. The Virgin Mary on the right could be an Apparition Virgin, led by angels and descending from Heaven. Her breast-feeding underlines her mediating part, that of an interceding character, this mediating role is also signalled by her not looking at the sponsor but her Son, whose eyes are directed at the praying Étienne Chevalier, as indicated by the index finger. Yet, Chevalier's gaze is not towards Christ ; it seems fixed on the Blessed Virgin's neck, the direction on which the lines of left-hand panel converge ; thus suggesting his prayer to the mediating Virgin who then appeals to Her Son.

In an illumination dated around 1410 by the Limburg brothers' circle (Dutch painters who often worked in the kingdom of France and in the dukedom of Burgundy), the classic adoration of the Magi scene is replaced by an adoration of the Child scene where the Magi are replaced by the Pope, St Jerome who is identified thanks to the lion, and a cardinal in prayer who seems to be the sponsor of the painting¹⁰. Presented and even patronized by St Jerome, who pats him on the head, the cardinal is depicted kneeling, [*p. 153*] hands together at chest level and gazing at the object of adoration, precisely the Christ of the Nativity. Facing him, as in a mirror-effect, the Blessed Virgin is exactly in the same position. Thus, just as men and women pray to Christ or the Virgin as a mediating force, the Virgin Mary herself is portrayed in prayer before Christ, which aptly points to this mediating or interceding role. Therefore certain body positions of the Virgin Mary herself may provide information on the posture to be had in prayer.

This kneeling posture, with hands together at chest level, outstretched fingers while gazing at Christ, the Virgin Mary or some saint, appears to be the most common body position while praying in the 15th to 17th century Catholic Europe. It is indeed by far the overriding posture in iconographical sources, and when written sources refer to praying postures, most of the time this seems to be the model. This usual kneeling posture and the accompanying gaze may have been adopted within a prayer relationship through the mediation of the crucifix or statuary. Kneeling, clasped hands with outstretched fingers seem to convey submission, humility, and the poignancy of the request, along with the usual gaze, all these elements point to the tension of the individual in prayer yearning for the saintly or divine character to whom the prayer is addressed.

The 15th, 16th and 17th centuries iconography shows a certain number of variations compared to the dominant posture. The depiction of a penitent St Jerome by the famous German artist Dürer shows him with only one knee on the ground¹¹. This is also the posture adopted most of the time when the Magi are depicted on their arrival before the Child prior to adoring Him. It can be therefore considered that this position with only one knee on the ground, almost never associated with clasped hands, corresponds to a posture adopted for only a short while and it is also a sign of submission and humility attached to genuflection. The Annunciation scenes in Tuscany (central Italy) of the 15th century show the Virgin Mary her hand on her chest or her hands crossed on her bosom, right when the angel announces that she will beget Christ. This gesture thus points to both the undisputed acceptance of divine workings and the inner profoundness of the religious sentiment. That is why this gesture may have been retained for meditation type prayers. So most representations of this gesture date from the 17th century, the time when meditative prayer was in full bloom. One of the most representative French painters in the illustration of this personal and pictorial conversion to a more demanding practice of prayer is the French Philippe de Champaigne. Around 1655, he

¹⁰ Glasgow, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum. See <http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk>.

¹¹ London, The National Gallery. See <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk>.

portrayed St Bruno, founder of the Carthusians (a religious order famous for their spirit of renunciation), and an exemplar for Champaigne¹². This explains the sobriety in the composition. The holy man has his hands crossed over his chest and bends into a *deep* [p. 154] attitude of contemplation in front of an open Bible. However, in this case, one is not sure whether St Bruno is kneeling. Twenty years earlier, Champaigne had painted a St Arsenius turned hermit¹³. Here the holy man's arms open up to the sky and the gesture is all more dramatic with the direction and intensity of the gaze. It must be added that this type of representation only developed in the 17th century, a time of intense growth for spiritual and mystical development¹⁴; it generally deals with a single, isolated character. Besides, the beam in the barn where Arsenius has retired is inscribed with the words "Arsenius, why have you left this world?". It is then a posture one associates with a mystical state.

As to mortification acts, which are rather common in the sternest circles in the 15th-17th centuries, they are sometimes shown in the 17th century, for example self-flagellation, generally with the depiction of St Hieronymus the Penitent. What is more of a bother is that the scarcity of images of the faithful during the celebration of Mass, and the written sources are not really of any further help on this matter. In his St Martin's Mass, French painter Le Sueur shows a group of kneeling believers in the first row, but just behind, other members of the congregation are visibly standing¹⁵. Yet, the position of the woman's hands in the foreground may suggest a reference to the ball of fire over St Martin than rather to the common and overriding standard practice of clasped hands and outstretched fingers.

2 : The body in prayer in front of images, in Western Europe

After this first part dealing with the representations of the body in prayer inside pictorial objects, let us now turn to the body in prayer in front of paintings or statues. In the middle of the 15th century, the painting, by Italian artist Colantonio, of an apparition of the Virgin Mary to St. Vincent Ferrier, can clearly be seen as a representation of prayer in front of a picture¹⁶. As a matter of fact, what stands out when the 15th and early 16th centuries are considered, is that two or three-dimensional images play a mediating role between the faithful and the divine element. In addition, as these images are mostly representations of the Virgin with Child, or saints, they act as tangible vehicles of a duplicated mediation : mediation through the saint or Virgin Mary, and likewise mediation through the materiality of the image as object¹⁷. That is why Calvinist Protestants, for whom any sort of mediation between the worshipper and God is to be discarded, reject both the cult of the saints and the use of pictures ; in 16th century Western Europe, in France and the Low Countries notably, this attitude is exemplified in iconoclastic campaigns leading to the destruction of statues and paintings to be found in churches.

In this context, the Council of Trent sets out and legitimizes the doctrine [p. 155] of a Catholic Reformation. On one hand, it aims putting an end to some medieval practices deemed superstitious. And on the other hand, it aims at fighting the Protestant ideas against the religious ceremonies, the mediating principle and the use of images in the cult. For these two reasons, the Council agrees, during its last session in 1563, on a decree "on the

¹² Stockholm, Nationalmuseum. See <http://www.nationalmuseum.se>.

¹³ Houston, Museum of Fine Arts. See <http://www.mfah.org> (/art/detail/18424).

¹⁴ Robert Bireley, *The Refashioning of Catholicism, 1450-1700. A Reassessment of the Counter Reformation*, Washington, The Catholic University of America Press, 1999 ; Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540-1770*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

¹⁵ Paris, Musée du Louvre. See <http://www.louvre.fr>.

¹⁶ Napoli, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte. See <http://www.museocapodimonte.beniculturali.it>.

¹⁷ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality. An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*, New York, Zone Books, 2015.

invocation, veneration, and relics of saints, and on sacred figures”. A French historian, Pierre-Antoine Fabre, has recently demonstrated the contorted general letter of the decree, which both legitimizes the iconographical vehicles and controls the conditions of their use¹⁸. In order to organize this control, the decree first establishes a hierarchical scheme. The decree starts by placing relics above images, then it places the educational and mnemonic function of images before their cult function. As to the last point, the decree insists that “through the figures we kiss, in front of which we uncover, and kneel, we adore Christ and worship the saints of whom they are a likeness”. Here it is plain to see that there is use of the body before the picture or statue and even at the contact of the statue. This corresponds to the representations of body use within images, i. e. before the deity or saint... so much so that the decree leaves us to assume that there is some form of divine presence within images. However, the decree’s concern is about the “likeness” and not about the presence of the saint or the divine... further down the decree adds that the honour paid to figures is in fact a reference to the models or prototypes they represent... before lastly stating that divinity cannot be represented... and that first and foremost the virtue of the picture is educational. So these statements are far from clear ; this can be explained by the cautious nature of the decree. Indeed, the basic issue the Council does not want to decide upon is that of saying whether these religious figures are lifeless (thus mere likeness, pedagogical, but then, why are they included in the cult, why bend or kneel before them, or touch them?) ; or whether, in some way, they are living objects thanks to their sacral value (but in this case, their main function is not educational, and they are not only likenesses but do act as efficient media). By so doing, the Council thus allows for a *de facto* fluidity between the different functions and consequently the different natures of the image. That is why the decree issues a demand for control over figures, to be exercised by bishops so that they can put an end to “abuses”, without any further details about the nature of these abuses. The Catholic Reformation rejects both iconoclasm as sacrilege and idolatry as superstition, without a clear hint of what a half-way would be. This issue then becomes a blind spot of the doctrine (but not the practice), and no further official clarification is brought to the significance of the ritual act of consecrating the figures to be installed in churches.

The case of the parishes of Upper-Brittany, in Western France, [p. 156] documented through the written sources I came across during my research, indicate the realities on the field during the 17th century¹⁹. The sources show that food-offerings in churches were common in the 16th and early 17th century ; these offerings were placed before some of the statues of local saints. These were generally wooden statues showing hieratic characters (Figure n° 1). In spite of the parishes’ expenses for their maintenance (the need to have them repainted, for example), their poor state is denounced by many a bishop at the beginning of the 17th century... may it be that they were touched and handled by the worshippers ? From 1620 on, the Catholic Reformation led to significant upheavals of the interior space of cult buildings. The offerings to these statues gradually disappeared ; it was the same with some of the statues of local saints, which were dismantled. The remaining statues were placed into altarpieces, this type of new furniture flourished in many a parish ; these statues then fell into iconographical agendas and acted as pedagogical models. Monumental altarpieces were also built into chancels where the lay audience wasn’t allowed in, so the lay people had to be content with watching the pictures from a distance (Figure n° 2). The art of painting developed and now had pride of place, at the centre of altarpieces. It must be pointed out that painting does not possess the materiality of a three-dimensional object, being more abstract, it

¹⁸ Pierre-Antoine Fabre, *Décréter l’image ? La XXV^e session du Concile de Trente*, Paris, Les Belles-Lettres, 2013.

¹⁹ Bruno Restif, *La Révolution des paroisses. Culture paroissiale et Réforme catholique en Haute-Bretagne aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes / Société d’Histoire et d’Archéologie de Bretagne, 2006.

acts as a stimulus only for the eye. Statues were relegated to the wings, therefore taking on a subordinate position. They were positioned high up in recesses, with no easy access, removing them was then considered illegitimate. Thanks to Baroque sculpture the characters were no longer in hieratic postures but in action, as to deliver a message (Figure n° 3). Therefore the magnificence of altarpieces with all their attraction and appeal helped to develop a knowing eye and consequently visual prayer. It was all the more so as the rood-screen – the partition wall used in the 16th century to delimit the boundary between chancel (the space for Mass performed by priests) and nave (the space devoted to worshippers) – was dismantled and replaced by a low fence. Finally, side windows and openings were often made in order to throw light on the high altar and main altarpiece, all this allows for optimal visibility (Figure n° 4). As to pilgrimage statues, they were positioned behind iron railings so as prevent contact rites. In this way, the implementation of Baroque art in churches made it possible to reinforce the turn initiated by the Council of Trent concerning the presence of figures, the body in prayer, thereby strengthening the pedagogical aspect and the control of the role of pictures in the cult. Yet, some statues were still being borne around in public processions which remained ever popular. From then on, it was only in parishes where the clergy had little control, as in Western Brittany, where small chapels were numerous, that statues remained the objects of water immersion rites in fountains during individual or group prayers²⁰. Otherwise, [p. 157] the act of kneeling, with clasped hands, remained the standard practice, but with a greater distance between the worshipper and the saintly figure, a figure whose educational dimension has been increased.

During the same period, spiritual books were produced for lay-people to use in churches during Mass ; as altarpieces, they also promoted meditative prayer, and even more personal²¹. One of these books, published in 1603, shows a man in prayer in front of an altar, he is kneeling and clasping his hands (Figure n° 5). Out of humility, he is not looking at the crucifix, it is a posture of contrition, that is to say a sincere repentance from sin. On the right, the man in prayer has his hands crossed and his chest more markedly bent before Christ carrying his cross ; the title of the piece makes it clear that he is deeply afflicted. In both cases, another image can be seen in the background. It is a meditation-type image, pictured by the man in prayer. He is therefore bodily praying in front of a material picture in order to produce a meditative image. And all this produces an image for the reader, so that he acts likewise, but also so that he can meditate on these very images. Written sources support this information, which is also valid for domestic interiors as for pictures hanging on walls. Indeed, in the 17th century, books called “daily exercises” were published for the edification of lay-people. And one of these hand-written books, kept in Reims public library, insists that the first thing one has to do, once dressed, is to kneel and pray before a “picture or a painting of devotion”²².

The prints in the Rambervillers’ book (i.e. figure n° 5) testify to this link between material pictures on one hand and mental pictures on the other hand. The spirituality of the Catholic Reformation owes a lot to Ignatian spirituality. Ignatius of Loyola is the founder of the Society of Jesus and author of *Spiritual Exercises*, whose final version was written in 1548. These *Spiritual Exercises* consist in the composition of a place (*locus*), which is in fact a mental composition one has to observe, while picturing their own bodily presence in the scene. The *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines*, by Nadal, were published in 1593 ; it is a series

²⁰ Georges Provost, *La Fête et le sacré. Pardons et pèlerinages en Bretagne aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles*, Paris, Cerf, 1998.

²¹ Frédéric Cousinié, *Images et méditation au XVII^e siècle*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007.

²² Municipal library of Reims, ms. 362.

of 153 etchings whose aim is to help attain the Ignatian *locus*²³. Thus the third etching of this collection devoted to the theme of the Holy Nativity is related to the recommendations of the *Spiritual Exercises* for a contemplation of the Nativity (Figure n° 6). It is noticeable in the etching that the angels and Joseph are in the same body posture which is known to be dominant, and the *Spiritual Exercises* invite one to picture oneself present among them. We might then consider that the individual in meditative prayer before this picture will mentally seek to be placed in the foreground, on the left, where there is still some unoccupied space and in the same body in prayer posture as the other characters, thus coming full circle. Last but not least, it must be kept in mind that the *Spiritual [p. 158] Exercises* invite the worshipper to bring their breathing to better control when praying (in a manner similar to yoga), to make an utterance at every breath they take and then meditate on the significance of the uttered words.

3 : The encounter of Western Catholicism with Mughal Islam: the strategic issue of visual and corporal aspects of the prayer

The last part of this paper will deal with the Indian echoes or reflections of these Western practices of prayer, which are spread, challenged, reinterpreted or misinterpreted during the encounter of Western Catholicism with Mughal Islam and Hinduism.

Relationships between Western Christians and Indian Muslims were tense from the start, because in Europe the Middle Ages were markedly a period of strife between Christendom and Dar-al-Islam, through crusades and *jihads*. Nevertheless, from 1580 on, Mughal Emperor Akbar, famous for his religious tolerance and his interest in debates between supporters of different creeds – an interest in which sufism played perhaps an important role²⁴, or an interest possibly fuelled by the will to create an imperial religion based on syncretism –, started inviting Goa Jesuits to reside at his court and explain what Christianity consisted in²⁵. Therefore, three Jesuits' missions visited the imperial court, either under Akbar's rule or his successor's, Jahângîr. The most active of these Jesuits was, during the third mission, Father Jérôme Xavier, a Spaniard, and great-nephew of Saint Francis Xavier. Father Jérôme Xavier learnt the Persian language and took part in the debates organized at the court, he also wrote many books in Persian. As a Muslim, Akbar was mostly shocked by the idea of the divinity of Christ. Hence Father Jérôme Xavier dedicated to Akbar and his son Salim, later Jahângîr, a book on the life of Christ, written in Persian ; it was entitled *Mir'āt al-quds (Mirror of Holiness)*²⁶. He had the manuscript adorned with 27 Persian-style illuminations. Father Jérôme Xavier first considered merely using the readily available

²³ Ralph Dekoninck, *Ad Imaginem. Statuts, fonctions et usages de l'image dans la littérature spirituelle jésuite du XVII^e siècle*, Genève, Droz, 2005.

²⁴ According to Pius Malekandathil, the Akbar's "remarkable ability to accommodate and respect plural belief systems and practices" has a connection with "his policy of *sulhi kull* and the ideology of *wahadat-al-wujud* (existential monism) fast disseminated then by the Sufis, particularly Chishti Shaikh Salim to which he was intimately attached by this time" (Pius Malekandathil, *The Mughals, the Portuguese and the Indian Ocean. Changing Imageries of Maritime India*, Delhi, Primus Books, 2013, p. 16). See also Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1975, vol. 1, especially p. 126, and Muzaffar Alam, "The Mughals, the Sufi Shaiks and the Formation of the Akbari Dispensation", *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 43/1, 2009, p. 135-174.

²⁵ There's a Catholic priest in Akbar's court since 1578, so before the beginning of the missions in 1580 (*Akbar and the Jesuits. An Account of the Jesuit Missions to the Court of Akbar. By Father Pierre Du Jarric. Translated with Introduction and Notes by C.H. Payne*, London, Routledge and Sons, 1926, p. 15).

²⁶ Pedro Moura Carvalho, *Mir'āt al-quds (Mirror of Holiness): A Life of Christ for Emperor Akbar. A Commentary on Father Jerome Xavier's Text and the Miniatures of Cleveland Museum of Art*, Leiden / Boston, Brill, 2012.

material of Nadal's *Imagines*, a copy of which was in the court²⁷ ; but had to give up, and finally opted for a version which was totally in line with the court's favoured Persian style.

The ninth illumination shows the Adoration of the Magi (Figure n° 7). The Magi are shown in this picture in a submissive posture ; such posture indicates a degree of Western influence, but this submissive posture is more marked than in most Western paintings. They have both knees on the ground and bow down ; the two Magi who are in front of Christ are not looking at Him, but look down at the ground. It is a direct reference to the following passage from the *Mirror of Holiness* : "they fell on their faces and prostrated themselves before Him, as they would to their lord, and worshipped him in all humility"²⁸. This posture where the worshipper is strongly bent and has [p. 159] both knees on the ground might also refer to the act of prostration in Muslim prayer, called "*sujud*" or "*sajdah*", but the act is yet to be completed here. As a matter of fact, the vertical position of the feet can also indicate the *sujud*, but the way the hands are positioned is definitely Christian. As to the Virgin Mary, she is portrayed seated in Indian fashion, a type of posture one does not find in the West. It can be noticed that her hands are not clasped but rather in an open position, which might refer to the position of the hands in Muslim prayer. The choice of this body posture is undoubtedly all the more purposeful here as the Virgin Mary happens to be an important figure in the Koran ; on the other hand, Akbar's wife – and Jahângîr's mother – was called Maryam al-Zamani, meaning "Mary of the Age", when she gave birth to Akbar's long-expected son²⁹. In this second level-reading, Joseph could be associated with Akbar, hence his active part, by pointing to Christ and the Virgin Mary, contrary to the usual depiction of a passive and unobtrusive character of Western painting. Lastly, it can be seen that like in Nadal's model of the Nativity, there is no character in the bottom left-hand corner. Indeed while Nadal made sure that this space was left unoccupied, so that the individuals in meditative prayer, in front of the picture, could visualise themselves there on the spot, inside the picture, by practicing the *Spiritual Exercises* ; here such possibility is discarded since the space is occupied by camels. It is a signal for the viewer that the picture acknowledges the fact that Muslims do not pray in front of pictures, and thus cannot mentally insert themselves inside pictures. The status of this picture is thus exclusively educational.

However, it should be pointed out that there are differences between the orthodox Muslim position on the question of image, of which this illumination is articulated, and some practices at Akbar's then Jâhangîr's court. According to the Jesuit Relations on the second mission, on the Feast of the Assumption of the year 1590, Akbar ordered princes and captains to bow down before a picture of the blessed Virgin and then to kiss it³⁰. This picture was shown later on by Akbar to the Jesuits of the Third Mission, and they saw at that point in time the little grandson of the emperor, Prince Khusru, who was eight years old, kneeling down and clasping his hands together, to imitate Christians³¹. It is a prayer posture also adopted by Akbar in 1595 when Jesuits recited litanies, while his son asked Jesuits to give him a picture of the Virgin³². At the end of the 1590s, according to the western priests, Akbar bowed his head and raised his hands to his face in front of a picture of Our Lady³³. Lastly, in 1602, the exhibition of a Virgin's picture attracted many Muslims who wanted to see it³⁴. This can perhaps be explained by the fact Akbar gradually moved away from Islam – even keeping a great veneration for Sufi Shaikh Salim Chishti – trying to create a religious [p. 160]

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15, 49-51.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 155 (translation by Wheeler M. Thackston).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³⁰ *Akbar and the Jesuits, op. cit.*, p. 44.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 62-63.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 66-67.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 160-163.

syncretism of which he would be the keystone. It is important to note that the integration of Christianity into this syncretistic religion went through the use of Our Lady's pictures and the use before these pictures of prayer postures depicted in these images. With the accession to the throne of Jahângîr in 1605 the syncretistic experiences were less developed, but the new emperor, who had a passion for the arts and a real curiosity, continued to show interest and reverence for pictures of Christ and the Virgin³⁵. From then on, the emperor's entourage did not hesitate to explicitly voice their disagreement with prayer before images, although the Jesuits' argumentation relied on the Tridentine distinction between image and prototype³⁶.

Moreover, it is worth noticing that, at Court, Jérôme Xavier and other Jesuits set up processions where penitents indulge in self-flagellation in memory of the death of Christ³⁷. This is a traditional Catholic practice, but self-whipping during processions is also a Shiite practice in memory of Karbala's Martyrs. It happens that there was at this time a strong Iranian then Shiite immigration movement at Akbar's and Jahângîr's courts, resulting in an important Iranian presence in State institutions³⁸. It may have been the intention of the Jesuits to develop this body practice in prayer common to both Catholics and Shiites, and for whom it has almost the same significance. However, it should also be noted that the ascetic requirements of Christianity in sexual matters, with a ban on polygamy, strongly disheartened the Mughals³⁹, either they chose Sunnism or Shiism... or religious syncretism including Christianity, Hinduism and even a Solar cult.

4 : The encounter of Western Catholicism with Hinduism : the strategic issue of visual and corporal aspects of the prayer

The relationships with the Hindus were different altogether. When, in May 1498, Vasco da Gama landed at Calicut (Kozhikode), and entered a Vaishnava temple, he was sure to be dealing with Christians in a church⁴⁰. Indeed, contrary to the Muslim cult, but in the same way as in the Catholic cult, a diversity of statues, lights, priests (*brahmans*), holy water, offerings (*pūjā*), incense, are to be found. Vasco da Gama confused the vimāna with a steeple, a statue of Garuda on the top of the stambha with a rooster, brahmans with Christian priests, Lakṣmī with Mary, and he thought that tilaka was a sign of Christianity⁴¹. In addition, there is a gesture of prayer, known as "*namaskāra*", which is akin to a Christian gesture (Figure n° 8). So Vasco da Gama, clasped hands, prayed with the Hindus before the statue of Lakṣmī he thought to be the Virgin Mary. Three factors may explain this mistake. First, as Sanjay Subrahmanyam writes, « the Portuguese expected to see 'lost' eastern Christians, whose practices would differ widely from their own ; they were thus willing to see in any structure that was not obviously a mosque, a church [*p. 161*] of some sort" ; "they were convinced that they were in the land of some sort of deviant Christians, anything that was not explicitly Islamic appeared, residually, to be Christian"⁴². Secondly, the Portuguese, who didn't

³⁵ *Jahângîr and the Jesuits. With an account of The Travels of Benedict Goes and The Mission to Pegu. From the relations of Father Fernão Guerreiro, S.j.. Translated by C.H. Payne*, London, Routledge and Sons, 1930.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 58-65.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

³⁸ John Norman Hollister, *The Shi'a of India*, London, Luzac and Company, 1953, especially p. 130-140.

³⁹ *Jahângîr and the Jesuits, op. cit.*, p. 67 for example.

⁴⁰ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

⁴¹ José Pedro Machado e Viriato Campos, *Vasco da Gama e a sua viagem de descobrimento. Com a edição crítica e leitura actualizada do relato anónimo da viagem*, Lisboa, Edição da câmara municipal de Lisboa, 1969 ; *Voyages de Vasco de Gama. Relations des expéditions de 1497-1499 et 1502-1503. Traduites et annotées par Paul Teyssier et Paul Valentin et présentées par Jean Aubin*, Paris, Éditions Chandeigne, 1995.

⁴² Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

understand Malayalam, used Arab interpreters even though they wanted to replace them in the trade with the Malabar coast, so we cannot exclude the possibility of a manipulation of the Portuguese by the Arab traders. Lastly, the Portuguese identified Christianity with Hinduism on the basis of similarities, primarily similarities of forms : prayer in front of images, cultural similarities, similarities of the body postures adopted for the prayer. Now, as has been shown by the French thinker Michel Foucault, the mode of reasoning in Western Europe around 1500 was analogical reasoning⁴³.

It was only during their second voyage to India that the Portuguese realized they had been mistaken. Their attitude towards this unknown religion changed radically, with the need to fit it in, always by analogical reasoning, with the other types of religion they knew. When considering religious diversity, Western Christians, in those times, only had four frames of reference at their disposal : Christians (among whom the deviant heretics), Jews (seen as those whose forefathers killed Jesus), Muslims (who must be fought as a general rule), and Gentiles or pagans who must be made to convert. It is considered in the Old Testament (Bible) that the distinctive feature of paganism is idolatry, a belief which consists in seeing statues as gods. We have seen that the Catholic stance on the use of images is purposefully unclear; it rests on a circulation between mere educational function and real mediation with the divine. The Hindu view is also complex, because there are different points of view and because the statue which is located in the sanctum sanctorum has to be distinguished from the sculptures on the temple façade. Nevertheless, we can say that Hinduism, especially in medieval and early-modern times, considers that the educational function of the image is the weakest. It favours the mediating function, which is strongly asserted, since images are deemed to embody a divine presence, thanks to the observance of rites⁴⁴. Therefore, contrary to the Catholic ritual of statue inauguration which is rather poor, the corresponding Hindu ritual, called *pratiṣṭhā*, is quite sophisticated and focused on the opening of the statue's eyes⁴⁵ (Figure n° 9). Accordingly, it is all considered as idolatry by the Portuguese and missionaries, who from then on claimed that Christianity has nothing whatsoever to do with Hinduism, which is seen as a collection of superstitions.

Around 1540, Portuguese policy became rather brutal, all the Hindu temples and statues on the Goa conquered territories were destroyed⁴⁶. Then, on the same locations, the Portuguese built churches, in which they placed Christian statues. For most Hindus, this was evidence that these places were [*p. 162*] sacred, since it was acknowledged by the Portuguese themselves. Being influenced by the Council of Trent with its vindication of picture use against the Protestant ban, also by the Jesuitical spirituality of praying before images, and finally by Baroque art's strong insistence on sight and grand altarpieces, the Goa Christians started building Baroque churches adorned with monumental altarpieces and statues. The policies used towards the newly converted Hindus are thus the same as those used in order to reform worshipping practices by the Catholic Reformation, that is to say placing the statues out of reach, so as to control the worshippers' devotion, while using the appeal and magnificence of altarpieces. Yet, Indian Baroque art has a specificity of its own ; it rests on the wealth of ornamental elements, the altarpieces' exceptional grandeur and dignity, the

⁴³ Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966.

⁴⁴ Gérard Colas, *Penser l'icône en Inde ancienne*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2012. From the 15th century on, there are some internal disputes on this subject (*ibid.*, p. 186).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 141-163.

⁴⁶ Alexander Henn, *Hindu-Catholic Encounters in Goa, Religion, Colonialism and Modernity*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2014, p. 7 and 40 sq. ; Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India. The Beginnings to AD 1707*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 226. Joy L. Pachuau underlined the resistances caused by these phenomena (Joy L. Pachuau, "Responses to the Portuguese Missionary Methods in India in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries", in Yogesh Sharma and José Leal Ferreira (ed.), *Portuguese Presence in India during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, New Delhi, Viva Books, 2008, p. 58-79).

lavish use of gold, the relatively hieratic poses of statues, and finally, the primacy of statuary art over two-dimensional painting (Figure n° 10)⁴⁷. In other words, it is all about adapting to Indian taste, with less educational intentions and a paramount importance given to altarpiece statuary art, whose status it is needless to underline in Hinduism. The Jesuits thus implemented strategies whose aim was to keep these new converts whose conversion to Christianity may be a little shaky.

Indeed, letters written by Jesuits in the 18th century attest that, in Southern India, the Virgin Mary is sometimes called Śakti, or even Durgā⁴⁸ ! Susan Bayly's study on Tamil Nadu and Kerala has also shown, for the 18th and 19th centuries, the "mélange of cults, rituals" between Christians and Hindus⁴⁹. As to prayer gestures, they are partly the same: bowing down from a standing position, and clasped hands (Figure n° 11, for Karnataka). However, the way of sitting is different as, in general, Christians do not sit cross-legged on the ground or on carpets, contrary to Hindus ; that being said, there is a specific oriental way of kneeling for prayer, as is shown by pieces of Kalankari folk art⁵⁰. Having said that, the different uses of the body may also cause clashes of cultures, for example while the missionaries were intent on fighting the practice of dancing as a form of prayer.

Finally, let us point out that at the beginning of the 17th century, Italian Jesuit Roberto Nobili came up with a method of accommodation for his Madurai Mission⁵¹. And so as to be understood by the *Brahmans*, he became a Christian *saṃnyāsin*, donning an orange gown and wooden sandals, holding a bamboo and a gourd full of water (*kamaṇḍalu*), he stuck to a vegetarian diet and embraced meditation. In so doing, he adapted the rite of Christian penance into an Indian form, thus embracing a Hindu corporal culture...and consequently the respect for the caste system and its reference to the notion of purity. After learning about Vedas, Nobili engaged Vedanta philosophers in public conversations and debates, and won a following of converts and [p. 163] disciples. He got quite knowledgeable about the Śaiva Siddhānta (dualistic philosophy)⁵² but also and above all about non-dualist Vedānta (*advaita*) of Śaṅkara, whose teachings were dominant in Madurai⁵³. It happens that Śaṅkara expressed his views about image : a distinction is to be drawn between the material, tangible frame, and the presence of the deity, he claimed that the divine element is superimposed on the image⁵⁴. Such a stance could be suitable to a tolerant Jesuit. Nobili then allowed his convert followers to celebrate *Pongal* and cook a milk rice meal before an image, but at the same time asking them to perform this before a cross.

Conclusion

The construction of prayer as an object of history is thus of great importance, all the more so as it allows to interconnect religious history, art history and the history of body. In the Catholic Western Europe of the 15th-17th centuries, the act of prayer was depicted within

⁴⁷ José Pereira, *Baroque India. The Neo-Roman religious architecture of South Asia: A Global stylistic survey*, New Delhi, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts / Aryan Books International, 2000.

⁴⁸ Ines G. Zupanov, *Missionary Tropics. The Catholic Frontier in India (16th-17th Centuries)*, The University of Michigan Press, 2005, p. 24.

⁴⁹ Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings. Muslims and Christians in South Indian society, 1700-1900*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

⁵⁰ See for example the cover photograph of Richard Fox Young (ed.), *India and the Indianness of Christianity. Essays on Understanding – Historical, Theological, and Bibliographical – in Honor of Robert Eric Frykenberg*, Grand Rapids / Cambridge, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009.

⁵¹ Vincent Cronin, *A Pearl to India. The Life of Roberto de Nobili*, New York, E. P. Dutton and Company, 1959.

⁵² Ines G. Zupanov, *Disputed Mission. Jesuit Experiments and Brahmanical Knowledge in Seventeenth-century India*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 26.

⁵³ Vincent Cronin, *op. cit.*, p. 93-94, 139-140, 235.

⁵⁴ Gérard Colas, *Penser l'icône en Inde ancienne, op. cit.*, p. 165-171.

pictorial representations which were themselves acts of prayer. These visual sources inform us on a system of mediation in which the Virgin played the leading role, and they informed the faithful on the posture to be had in prayer. Kneeling, clasped hands with outstretched fingers and accompanying gaze constituted the dominant posture, but there were a certain number of variations for different meanings : meditation type prayers, mystical state or mortification.

This question of the body in prayer within pictorial representations needs to be complemented by the question of the body in prayer in front of the representations, all the more so as the faithful prayed in front of those pictures which were both acts of prayer and representation of the act of prayer... or else they prayed before statues of saints or the Virgin, exactly like the sponsors shown in pictorial representations. These images acted as tangible vehicles of a duplicated mediation : mediation through the saint or Virgin Mary, and likewise mediation through the materiality of the image as object. The Council of Trent both legitimized the iconographical vehicles and placed the educational and mnemonic function of images before their cult function... but the same decree led us to assume that there is some form of divine presence within images. One single form of control became thus necessary. In Catholic Western Europe, statues were placed into altarpieces, then fell into iconographical agendas and acted as pedagogical models, and thanks to Baroque sculpture the characters were in action, in order to deliver a message. The act of kneeling remained the standard practice, but with a greater distance, which increased visual prayer. Jesuit spirituality encouraged to rely on material pictures to compose mental pictures, with the help of the body posture.

In the same period, there were new encounters between Westerners and Indians, as the Jesuits had come to India to convert Muslims and Hindus, [p. 164] hence the Catholic Western uses of prayer, body and images played an important role in these encounters. The Akbar's will to create a syncretistic and imperial religion promoted an original encounter between Catholicism and Islam, with the production of illuminations depicting the body posture to be had in prayer, but without the composition of place for mental picture. In these pictures there was deliberate confusion between Catholic posture and Muslim posture, mediation of the saints and mediation of the Emperor's family. The Jesuits have perhaps also favoured a deliberate confusion between Catholic asceticism and Shiite asceticism, but to no avail. Above all, the Akbar's and Jahângîr's use of Catholic postures of prayer in front of images caused alarm with the Muslims, and this unprecedented syncretism between Catholicism and Islam failed during Jahângîr's reign.

The encounter of Western Catholicism with Hinduism was different altogether. In 1498, Vasco da Gama confused all he saw in a Vaishnava temple with the characteristics of a Christian Church, because of his analogical reasoning, on the basis of the prayer postures and of the use of images, including prayer in front of these images. In the Hindu posture there was no kneeling, but clasped hands with outstretched fingers and head bow. In a second stage, Western Christians associated Hinduism with idolatry, because of the Hindu point of view on images, with a low educational function and a real capacity, thanks to the observance of rites, to embody a divine presence, that did not match up to the Trent's decree. In Goa, the Portuguese built churches with monumental altarpieces and baroque statues, as in Europe, but all was adapted to Indian taste, with special emphasis on sculpture, gold and hieratic attitudes of the figures, that may be the way to manifest the Divine. In Madurai, the Jesuit Roberto de Nobili adapted the rite of Christian penance into an Indian form, thus embracing a Hindu corporal culture... and consequently its reference to the notion of purity, and he was lucky that the dominant philosophy in Madurai was the *advaita* of Śankara, whose point of view about images can be articulated with the Catholic one. But his method of accommodation provoked the controversy on the "Malabar Rites"...

The history of prayer is therefore an interesting way to study cultural and religious encounters. Further investigations, including Indian sources, may specify some aspects of the question. And the same question can also be asked for the encounter between Western Catholics and Syrian Christians of the Malabar Coast, or between Sufism and Hinduism...

Bruno Restif
Associate Professor of Early-Modern History
University of Reims Champagne-Ardenne, France
CERHIC-EA2616
bruno.restif@univ-reims.fr

In the published version, the footnotes are placed after the text, p. 164-167.

P. 168-175 : pictures. In the present version these pictures are deliberately altered ; for better viewing please consult the published version.

P. 168 :

Fig. 1 : Statue of a local saint (associated with saint Mathurin) in the church of Guenroc (Brittany, Western France), 16th century. Photograph by Bruno Restif.



Fig. 2 : Church of Piré (Brittany, Western France). Main altarpiece, in chancel, 1632. Photograph by Bruno Restif.



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Fig. 3 : Church of La Gouesnière (Brittany, Western France). Detail of the main altarpiece. Statue of Saint Michel, 1662. Photograph by Bruno Restif.



Fig. 4 : Church of Billé (Brittany, Western France). Main altarpiece, in chancel, 1629. Photograph by Bruno Restif.



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Fig. 5 : Alphonse de Rambervillers, *Les devots elancements du poete chrestien*, 1603.



P. 171 :

Fig. 6 : Nadal, *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines*, 1593. Third etching : the Nativity.



P. 172 :

Fig. 7 : The Adoration of the Magi, from a Mirror of Holiness (Mir'at al-quds) of Father Jerome Xavier, 1602-1604. Northern India, Uttar Pradesh, Allahabad, Mughal period. Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper; sheet: 26.3 x 15.6 cm (10 5/16 x 6 1/8 in); image: 22.7 x 12.2 cm (8 7/8 x 4 3/4 in). The Cleveland Museum of Art, John L. Severance Fund 2005.145.7.

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Fig. 8 : Madurai, temple of Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara. Statues of a king and his wives, who pay homage to Śiva Sundareśvara through the gesture known as “namaskāra”. Photograph by Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat.



Fig. 9 : Pratiṣṭhā in a Vaishnava temple, Karnataka. Photograph by Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat.



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Fig. 10 : Church St Francis of Assisi, Old Goa. Main altarpiece. Photograph by Bruno Restif.



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Fig. 11 : On the side of the Vaishnava temple of Mysore's palace, indications for the gestures of prayer, in kannada language. The words employed are *Śakti*, *Caitanya* (Consciousness) and *Īsvarī Caitanya*. Photograph by Bruno Restif.

