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## Lopez, Jr., D.S. & Thupten Jinpa. *Dispelling the Darkness: A Jesuit's Quest for the Soul of Tibet*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017.

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**Lopez, Jr., D.S. & Thupten Jinpa. *Dispelling the Darkness: A Jesuit's Quest for the Soul of Tibet*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017.**

The Italian Jesuit Ippolito Desideri reached Lhasa on March 18, 1716. He was welcomed and summoned to the court. Soon, he began to write a text in the Tibetan language that would become an exposition of Christian faith, called *Dawn, Signaling the Rising of the Sun That Dispels the Darkness*. He presented his exposition to the ruling Mongol king, Lhazang Khan, who apparently remained unimpressed. In a letter to the pope, dated February 13, 1717, some eleven months after he arrived in Lhasa, Desideri informed the pontiff that he had composed two texts addressing the errors of Buddhism. These texts, which may or may not include *Dawn*, became the preparatory work for Desideri's *Essence of the Christian Religion* and *Inquiry Concerning the Doctrines of Previous lives and of Emptiness*. Written in Tibetan, the two manuscripts were conceived as philosophical darts against two specific Buddhist doctrines: the doctrine of reincarnation and the doctrine of emptiness. Lopez and Thupten's book, *Dispelling the Darkness: A Jesuit's Quest for the Soul of Tibet*, offers the first English-language translation of Desideri's original Tibetan writings *Essence of the Christian Religion* and *Inquiry Concerning the Doctrines of Previous lives and of Emptiness*.

Ippolito Desideri was born in the town of Pistoia, near Florence, in 1684. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1700 and spent several years in Rome, excelling in philosophy and theology. In 1712, he left Italy for India. There, with a fellow Jesuit, he traveled to Lhasa. Desideri spent almost seven years in Tibet, in Lhasa, and other locations, producing at least five manuscripts written in Latin, Italian, or Tibetan languages. He received the order to leave Tibet in 1721 and returned to India. Finally, in 1727, he arrived in Italy. He died in Rome in 1733 at the age of 48.

A prolific author, Desideri is responsible for two sets of written works. His manuscripts in Italian were written after his return to Italy and include a report describing Buddhism to Western Catholics (*Notizii Istoriche del Tibet (Historical Notices of Tibet)*) and a manual for Christian missionaries in Tibet. His works in the Tibetan language serve to reframe Buddhism as an erroneous religion and are thought to be aimed at a Tibetan audience of Buddhist scholars; to put it differently, these writing aim for conversion. The idea behind these specific texts is as follows: Tibetan Buddhism is a philosophy with the doctrines of reincarnation and emptiness operating as its intellectual foundations. If these foundations are cracked, Buddhism becomes groundless, and Buddhist scholars will convert. Due to the immense prestige of Buddhist scholars in early modern Tibet, the conversion of scholars would bring the conversion of laity. It goes without saying that no evidence exists, other than in some of Desideri's notes, that any converts were made as a consequence of his texts (p. 29). As a matter of fact, no evidence exists that any Buddhist scholars read the manuscripts during Desideri's permanence in Tibet (p. 6). Thus, Desideri's Tibetan writings can be seen as both tools of mission as well as pieces of Tibetan studies.

Desideri carried his texts in Tibetan language with him back to India and then with him to Rome. He considered the *Inquiry* his most important Tibetan manuscript and hoped to translate the manuscript into Latin. In 1732, however, the Propaganda Fide, the department of the administration of the Roman Catholic Church responsible for missionary work and related activities of evangelization, confirmed its grant of the Tibet mission to the Capuchin order. The department also barred any missionary activity and even banned from the Jesuit mission the publication of any writing relating to Tibet. Thus, Desideri's Tibetan works nearly died with him.

Four of his Tibetan works were rediscovered in 1924 by Cornelius Wessels in the Jesuit Archives, and a fifth, *Essence*, only in 1970, having been erroneously catalogued in the Japanese section of the same archives. *Dispelling the Darkness* translates into English a selection from the *Inquiry* and the whole of *Essence* and provides an introduction both to Desideri's unfortunate story and to his writings.

*Dispelling the Darkness* is an important contribution to scholarship of Tibetan history, Buddhist studies, Buddhism-Christian dialogue, the history and theology of mission, church history, and Jesuit history. The book makes available to English audiences the remarkable core of Desideri's Tibetan writings and allows readers to penetrate his hermeneutic strategies at work. The authors note that Desideri was a product of the dominant scholastic paradigm of his time, a form of Aristotelian philosophy filtered through Thomas Aquino's theological method (p. 13). He decided to engage Buddhist scholars intellectually, not to simply adopt a Tibetan vocabulary. Most importantly, and impressively, he recast scholastic arguments in Buddhist tropes and logic. Desideri mastered the literary styles of classical Tibetan texts and adopted the thought forms of Buddhism to demonstrate the fallacy of the fundamental doctrines of emptiness and of reincarnation.

This reviewer cannot read Tibetan, so he must defer to specialists such as Michael Sweet, author of *Mission to Tibet: The Extraordinary Eighteenth-Century Account of Father Ippolito Desideri, S.J.* the translation of *Notizii Istoriche* for the English-speaking world, to confirm that Lopez and Thupten's book offers a lucid and accurate translation of Desideri's Tibetan texts into English. The translation must have been particularly demanding due to the fact that Desideri alternates prose and poetry and leaves copious notes in Italian in the margins of his manuscripts.

In a work of such magnitude, it is difficult to find faults. This reviewer, however, would have appreciated a discussion on the theological principles at work in Desideri's hermeneutic strategy of intellectual mission. Lopez and Thupten explain that scholasticism was the paradigm "of all the great Jesuit missionaries in Asia" (p. 13). However, they do not clarify that the scholasticism in question was not the *original* scholasticism but rather a later version—that of the baroque period—the so-called second scholasticism, which implies a separation between the order of the natural and that of the supernatural. This is not a technicality; rather, it is the explanation of Desideri's hermeneutical strategy. According to baroque scholasticism, in fact, the separation between nature and the order of the supernatural is mirrored in theology by the separation between natural revelation and positive revelation. Doctrines such as the existence of one God and retribution after death belong to natural revelation and can be accepted with the light of reason, that is, rational arguments. Desideri wrote his Tibetan manuscripts to make rational arguments and, in this way, dispelled the darkness of idolatry from Tibet.

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