Dispelling the Darkness: A Jesuit's Quest for the Soul of Tibet, by Donal S. Lopez Jr. and Thupten Jinpa. Harvard University Press, 2017. 320 pp. Hb and e-book. £23.95. ISBN-13: 9780674659704.

Reviewed by Lucia Galli, École Pratique des Hautes Études, lubigalli@gmail.com

Based on a refined work of archival research, historical contextualisation, philosophical expertise and linguistic finesse, *Dispelling the Darkness: A Jesuit's Quest for the Soul of Tibet* is a scholarly tour de force. The title itself is a masterful innuendo to Ippolito Desideri (1684–1733)'s *Inquiry concerning the Doctrine of Previous Lives and Emptiness*: an incomplete treatise, written in Tibetan, in which the Jesuit priest set to confute the Buddhist doctrines of rebirth and emptiness. The dispelling of darkness — to borrow Desideri's bold rephrasing of a passage from Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* — did indeed entail, for the Tuscan missionary, a quest for an immortal soul: that same self negated by the theory of emptiness. By speaking in codes, the authors — Donal S. Lopez Jr. and Thupten Jinpa — immediately set the tone for the interpretative framework upon which their entire volume is structured.

The book is divided into six sections: a general overview, two introductory chapters to the works that the authors select as representative of Desideri's Tibetan writings (namely *Inquiry* and *Essence of the Christian Religion*), each followed by the English translation of the respective Tibetan text (a selection of passages for the *Inquiry*, the entire work in the case of *Essence*), and some concluding remarks. The volume ends with three appendices presenting respectively: a topical outline (*sa bcad*) of *Inquiry* ('Appendix One'); a list of the subjects broached in Desideri's *opus magnum* on the basis of the markers annotated by the author himself in the left-hand margin of the folios ('Appendix Two'), and the English translation and original text of what appears to be the commencement of a Latin version of *Inquiry* ('Appendix Three').

The opening section ('Introduction') places Desideri's missionary activities within the wider context of Jesuit proselytism in Asia. Although often counted among the most prolific converters of the Buddhist lands, when measured against his confreres' results the Tuscan Jesuit's fame is rather insubstantial. He made very few converts. He did not translate any European work into Tibetan. He could not count on any sponsorship or protection by local rulers. All things considered, he would have been probably destined to historical anonymity had it not been for the fortuitous recovery of his writings in the early twentieth century.

The first of Desideri's works to be retrieved was *Notizie Istoriche del Thibet* (*Historical Notices of Tibet*), a lengthy *relazione* ('report') that he composed upon his return to Italy. Although mentioned for the first time by Cornelius Wessels in 1924, *Notizie Istoriche* remained fairly understudied until 2010, when an accurate translation and study of the work were made available to an English readership by Michael Sweet and Leonard Zwilling (*Mission to Tibet: The Extraordinary Eighteenth-*

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Century Account of Father Ippolito Desideri, S.J.). Most of Desideri's works, including the *relazione*, were stored in the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), where they lay unknown until Wessels reported the existence of four texts written in Tibetan (*Dawn, Signalling the Rising of the Sun That Dispels the Darkness; Inquiry concerning the Doctrine of Previous Lives and Emptiness; Origin of Sentient Being, Phenomena, and So Forth*; and *Definite Goodness*), the content of which remained obscured up to the late 1980s. A fifth text, *Essence of the Christian Religion*, initially misplaced, was fortuitously retrieved in 1970. Among these extant works Desideri's *opus magnum*, both in terms of breadth of content and sheer volume, is certainly *Inquiry*, yet prior to Lopez Jr. and Jinpa's book no translation, either in whole or part, has ever been attempted. The reason for this must be sought both in the dimension of the work itself — totalling 232 folios (464 pages) in its incomplete form — and the convoluted style in which it is written. Caught between scholarly desire and editorial necessities, the authors resorted to a careful process of selection. The extensive excerpts offered in the volume successfully convey Desideri's intention to confute rebirth and emptiness, regardless of the clear limitations due to the incomplete nature of the Tuscan Jesuit's masterpiece. *Inquiry* ends in fact without a satisfactory refutation of either theory, although Desideri's position regarding the doctrine of emptiness may be gathered from elsewhere in his extant Tibetan works, including *Essence of the Christian Religion*: a catechism, here introduced and translated in its entirety in the third and fourth chapters.

The first and second chapters ('Introduction to *Inquiry concerning the Doctrine of Previous Lives and Emptiness*' and 'Selections from *Inquiry concerning the Doctrine of Previous Lives and Emptiness*' respectively) are meant to be read together, the first being a study and commentary of the second. The introductory chapter to *Inquiry* begins with an overview of the carefully crafted preamble in which the Jesuits set the stage for the refutation to come. The prelude — consisting of four poems of various content and style and a prose section — follows Tibetan literary conventions and lays the ground for the subsequent critique of Buddhism and its doctrines of metempsychosis and emptiness, where Desideri draws heavily from the works of Tsong kha pa (1357–1419), Atiśa (980–1054), and Śāntideva (685?–763?). Often boldly paraphrasing well-known verses to suit his aims, the Jesuit scholar clearly aims to best his opponents through the use of their own vocabulary, scholastic genres, and authoritative sources.

In the second of the selected passages from *Inquiry*, Lopez Jr. and Jinpa examine the argumentative approach adopted by Desideri in relation to the Tibetan claim that birth has no beginning. Unsurprisingly, Desideri reserves the strongest attack for the theory of *karma*, arguing that the lack of identity between former and present lives implicates the loss of the deeds accumulated in the past, therefore cutting the thread of beginningless rebirths that negates the existence of both creation and creator. The selected passages examined and commented on in 'Introduction to *Inquiry*' are translated *in extenso* in the second chapter.

Similar to the first and second chapters, 'Introduction to *Essence of the Christian Religion*' and '*Essence of the Christian Religion*' complement each other, the third chap-

ter being preparatory to the fourth. Unique among Desideri's works in terms of script, format and content, *Essence* presents a disjunction in topic and style, as the first quarter of the text — dedicated to a refutation of the theory of emptiness — diverges substantially from what follows, namely a traditional Roman Catholic catechism. Lopez Jr. and Jinpa address the reason for this apparent inconsistency by arguing that Desideri's rejection of the doctrine of emptiness laid the necessary foundation upon which he built his presentation of Christianity. It is worth noticing that most of the arguments Desideri uses to support the aseity of God are taken from Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, and uncannily resemble those refuted by Dharmakīrti in his sixth century *Pramāṇavārttika*. Although the latter was part of the dGe lugs pa curriculum, it is evident that Desideri was not aware of the work, a fact that may be ascribed to his total reliance on Tsong kha pa as his main (perhaps only) source of knowledge. The present reader shares the authors' regret for such a missed opportunity to discover how a proud inheritor of the Thomist tradition — as Desideri certainly was — would have addressed Dharmakīrti's objections. Having purportedly refuted the theory of emptiness, the Jesuit dedicated the rest of *Essence* to an explanation of the Christian faith according to the Roman Catholic doctrine of his days.

In the fourth chapter, due to the dramatic shift in language, style, and content, Lopez Jr. and Jinpa decide for a different approach. Whereas, up to this point, their interest lay in the philosophical finesse of Desideri's argumentation, the authors now turn to the language choices made by the missionary in the attempt to convey in Tibetan language truths and concepts of the Catholic Church. In composing his catechism, Desideri creatively adopts the format of Tibetan doxographical literature with its tripartite division into 'basis' (*gzhi*), or exposition of ontology (i.e. the Apostles' Creed and Lord's Prayer); 'path' (*lam*), or exposition of praxis (i.e. the Ten Commandments and Six Commandments) and 'fruition' (*'bras bu*), or exposition of soteriology (i.e. the description of Heaven and Hell). In adapting Buddhist vocabulary to convey Christian content, Desideri simply follows the path indicated by the founder of the Society of Jesus, Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556), which was implemented by Jesuits in any of their missions.

Dispelling the Darkness is a remarkable work and certainly a precious addendum to scholarship on Jesuit missionary activities in general, and on the figure of Ippolito Desideri in particular. Yet, the present reader cannot refrain from wondering on the suitability of including the full translation of *Essence of the Christian Religion* in a volume mostly dedicated to Desideri's refutation of the theory of rebirth and emptiness. The authors' decision to compensate the incompleteness of *Inquiry* by drawing on the still extant Tibetan works of the Tuscan missionary is laudable, and certainly the first quarter of *Essence* appears as a natural extension of *Inquiry* (a seamless passage largely ascribable to the authors' stylistic finesse). In light of that, it might have been preferable to include a scholarly presentation, and possibly selected passages, from both *Origin of Sentient Being*, *Phenomena*, and *So Forth* and *Definite Goodness*: two other works in which Desideri dealt with the topic of emptiness at length. To do so would further increase the reader's understanding and appreciation of the priest's

argumentative style (*Essence of the Christian Faith* has been already translated and discussed by Elaine M. Robson in 2014 as part of her University of Bristol doctoral thesis 'A Christian Catechism in Tibetan', which is currently available to download online). Regardless of personal preferences, Lopez Jr. and Jinpa's *Dispelling the Darkness* is a praiseworthy contribution to the field of Jesuit Studies and a patent scholarly achievement.