

In this essay, James P Ronda explores the nature of the relationship between Christian Missionaries and “Indians” in the 17th century as interpreted by Historians. He argues that the traditional romantic view that missionaries played a particularly benevolent role as pious agents of change is inaccurate, and serves to whitewash efforts of Colonialism; in doing so, it fails to acknowledge the thoughtful and measured response by Indians to the so-called service¹. Ronda sheds light on an alternate and more balanced perspective that explains the response as complex. From this context, a revised interpretation is necessary to understanding the experience from the point of view of the Indian. He suggests that a more accurate account reveals that some Indians adopted the new religion and its expectations, while others “incorporated certain Christian elements into their lives while rejecting the white man’s message”.² Many approached this quandary with a strong resistance to such an imposition, and held firm to their traditional beliefs and cultural practices³ To me, the most compelling and convincing aspect of this essay is the inclusion of the Indian voice, which has been historically absent; I understand this to be a mechanism of Colonialism that is present to this day.

Ronda relies on secondary sources to produce his essay. He makes the point that it is difficult to tease out the Indian perspective because it was largely dismissed or ignored all together; he states that “Indian speeches were filtered through white interpreters, recorded by white secretaries, and ultimately arranged in the memoirs of white missionaries”⁴.

There is one main question that comes to mind upon reading this essay: have there been times that I have based my own conclusions on relatively one sided explanations that excluded important perspectives, even simply because the alternative may make me uncomfortable or not support previously held beliefs? The answer is most surely, yes.

Notes

1. James P. Ronda, “We Are Well As We Are”: An Indian Critique of Seventeenth-Century Christian Missions, *The William and Mary Quarterly* 34:1 (January 1977), 66.
2. Ronda, *We Are Well As We Are*, 67.
3. Ronda, *We Are Well As We Are*, 67.
4. Ronda, *We Are Well As We Are*, 67-68.