This book provides a critical review of “mediated Christianity,” taking the global–American–charismatic–Pentecostal Christianity broadcast to Indian cities, such as Chennai, as its focus. As a liberal Christian committed to interfaith dialogue and the promotion of India’s “common values,” the author is worried about the media dominance of right wing, foreign-driven forms of Christianity, which, pushing for a global Christian umma, harden religious boundaries and potentially provoke religious tensions latent in postcolonial India.

Part 1 of the book is taken up with four overview chapters respectively on Christian (and other) fundamentalisms, Christian fundamentalism and the media, Christianity in India, and Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism. These provide useful background, place fundamentalist Christianity within its broader political field and set out the author’s agenda. There are particularly interesting observations about the engagement of internationally influential Pentecostal churches and Indian regional politics (the political–financial conditions for neo-Pentecostal expansion), the centralizing mission of these churches and their tension with mainstream Indian churches committed to “Indianization” or the social gospel. The author offers a political–economic framework within which the role of Christian broadcasting can be understood in terms of packaging and marketing a religiosity with self-interested business-friendly conservative political messages. These, along with the accumulation of economic capital, which neo-Pentecostal churches enable, are “misrecognized,” to use a concept from Pierre Bourdieu that Thomas adopts. Bourdieu’s wider set of theoretical tools on which the study wishes to draw are set out in chapter 5 (the book’s part 2), although the study really lacks the ethnographic material with which to demonstrate such processes as “symbolic violence” or “misrecognition,” or to understand the structural relations of power of which they are actually a part (e.g., a good deal more contextual–historical explanation is needed to explicate Christian conversion as “symbolic violence”).

The book’s third part has three chapters dealing with Christian broadcasting in India (chapter 5), Hindu–Christian “cyber-contestations” (chapter 6) and an example of a recent “Christian Crusade” (chapter 7). Chapter 5’s overview of the Christian radio, television and Internet that reaches south India is highly informative and brings an under-researched topic into view for the first time. This is the book’s key and best chapter. Chapter 6 turns to contestations between Hindu and Christian extremists (including “web wars”) but leaves readers without the evidence with which to judge the assertion that these erode interfaith relationships in India.
or lead to an increase in interfaith tensions. The absence of interfaith tension (in Chennai) in the midst of growing Pentecostalism might be as interesting a question to pursue. Similar questions arise in the context of the Benny Hinn’s Festival of Blessings in Bengaluru described in chapter 7. The concluding chapter makes the case for responsibility, regulation and multi-faith broadcasting as a counter to the polarizing effects of current religious broadcasting.

This is a broad-sweep book with an axe to grind. The problem is that it offers little in terms of new empirical material to push its arguments forward, relying too much on unsubstantiated generalization. The reader is left wanting to know much more about the social structuring of engagement with Christian media (for instance, the patterns of Hindu participation in Pentecostal worship) and the evidence for the way polarizing religious discourse does, or does not, translate into interfaith social tension in south India, and why. A much more solid historical and sociological foundation is required for the book’s premise. To date the best empirical work on Hindu–Christian violence (mostly) in adivasi regions shows these to be complex conflicts, emerging from caste–ethnic divisions in the context of political–economic changes that only secondarily emerge as interreligious tensions strategically linked to polarizing discourses. The lack of empirical material makes this book sociologically weak (e.g., references to “the average Christian in India”). By locating its problematic of power in the relationships between globalized Christianity and India’s fragile religious diversity, the book singularly fails properly to locate the study of modern Indian Christianity in its class and caste context. There is an implicit middle-class bias in the treatment of the consumption of Christianity, which overlooks the significance of existing research on class and gender-differentiated congregations and forms of worship, and a discussion of religious culture and dialogue which significantly underplays the caste politics of Indian Christianity, from mass conversion movements in the nineteenth century to contemporary Dalit Christian activism. And it gives significance to the discursive production of Hindu–Christian cultural discontinuity (or division), which may not exist in social practice.

The book has presentational oddities (numbered paragraph and chapter-divided references) which will not be to every reader’s liking. Nonetheless, it usefully marks out an important territory of new enquiry which readers will find intriguing and in which some will find an invitation to conduct more in-depth empirical research.

University of London, London, United Kingdom

DAVID MOSSE