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Book Review: *Christians in South Indian Villages, 1959-2009,* by John B. Carman and Chilkuri Vasantha Rao

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Christians in South Indian Villages, 1959-2009: Decline and Revival in Telangana. By **John B. Carman and Chilkuri Vasantha Rao**. Studies in the History of Christian Missions. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014. xvi + 242 pp. \$35.00 paper.

This is an unusual work for a variety of reasons. First, the book employs individual and team fieldwork in the Telangana region of India to update a study conducted there half a century prior: P. Y. Luke and John Carman's *Village Christians and Hindu Culture: Study of a Rural Church in Andhra Pradesh* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968). The diachronic perspective this methodology allows is the book's most compelling and appealing feature, and the core chapters of the book highlight continuities and changes over the fifty intervening years, with two particularly salient themes: 1) the decline of the predominantly low-caste, originally-studied mainstream Church of South India congregations accompanied by the dramatic rise of frequently multi-caste, independent Pentecostal and evangelical congregations, and 2) the continued shift towards individual (rather than family or community) conversions that are largely provoked by experiences of physical or spiritual healing. The book is at its best, in my view, in its microscopic analyses of dynamics like these, as well as in its description of Christian adaptations of popular Hindu rituals and celebrations. That said, the book is also unusual, in contemporary scholarship, for a near complete absence of explicit engagement with other studies of Indian Christianity and the last quarter century of more theoretical research in conversion studies, global Christianity, and the anthropology of Christianity. This absence may make the volume easier to access, and therefore better for non-specialist readers, but many scholars in these fields will, I suspect, find the study less stimulating as a result.

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