This talk would engage with the seeming anachronism of deploying spiritual renderings in the service of the immanent/material gain and attaching sacrality to modern secular-material transformations. It would demonstrate how religious and theological dispositions worked – in both explicit and implicit ways – in shoring up enterprises of land reclamation and agrarian expansion in modern Kerala, South India. Couched in a religious vocabulary reclamation became a godly sanctioned mission in the Christian narratives of this modern enterprise. Also, normative truths of migration and agrarian expansion were produced in a wider moral economy of salvaging wilderness to a new cosmos of development and prosperity, with its own sense of virtue/sin, morality/immorality and benediction/punishment. At the same time, the Christian world had its own estrangements along this mission, driving two Catholic denominations into conflict for authority and identity. The talk thus complicates the material/spiritual binary in order to explicate the adaptive functions they perform in constituting interstices and to demonstrate that the secular-material is not always deprived of a sense of the sacred and its distinctive moralities.

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