

Manufacturing Otherness

Manufacturing Otherness:
Missions and Indigenous Cultures
in Latin America

Edited by

Sergio Botta

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

Manufacturing Otherness:
Missions and Indigenous Cultures in Latin America,
Edited by Sergio Botta

This book first published 2013

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2013 by Sergio Botta and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-5160-4, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-5160-2

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Lists of Figures and Tables	vii
Introduction	1
Manufacturing Otherness: Missions and Indigenous Cultures in Latin America	
<i>Sergio Botta</i>	
Chapter One.....	11
Towards a Missionary Theory of Polytheism: The Franciscans in the Face of the Indigenous Religions of New Spain	
<i>Sergio Botta</i>	
Chapter Two	37
The Doctrine of Juli: Foundation, Development and the New Identity in a Shared Space	
<i>Virginia Battisti Delia</i>	
Chapter Three	63
Jesuits and Indians in the Borderlands (Vice-Royalty of Peru, 16th-18th Centuries)	
<i>Nikolai Rakutz</i>	
Chapter Four	95
Making the Indigenous Speak: The Jesuit Missionary Diego de Rosales in Colonial Chile, 17th Century	
<i>Rafael Gaune</i>	
Chapter Five	121
Negation and Exaltation of the <i>sertanistas</i> of São Paulo in the Discourses of Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix, D. José Vaissette and Gaspar da Madre de Deus (1756-1774)	
<i>Michel Kobelinski</i>	

Chapter Six	147
Demonym Cartography: Native Peoples and Inquisition in Portuguese America (18th Century)	
<i>Maria Leônia Chaves de Resende</i>	
Chapter Seven.....	175
Christian Bodies, Other Bodies: Processes of Conversion and Transformation in Northeastern Amazonia	
<i>Vanessa Elisa Grotti</i>	
Chapter Eight.....	189
Indian Missionary or Pastor? Reflections on a Religious Trajectory in the Amazon	
<i>Paride Bollettin</i>	
Chapter Nine.....	209
The Indigenist Missionary Council: A Brazilian Experience between Culture and Faith	
<i>Marcos Pereira Rufino</i>	
Chapter Ten	229
Religious Conflicts, Missionary Action and Indigenous Activism in the Western Brazilian Amazon	
<i>Sidnei Clemente Peres</i>	
Chapter Eleven	251
Seeing is Believing? Vision and Indigenous Agency in the Anglican Evangelisation of the Paraguayan Chaco	
<i>Alejandro Martínez</i>	
Chapter Twelve	271
The Hidden Heritage	
<i>Valéria Nely César de Carvalho</i>	
Contributors.....	281
Index.....	285

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 4.1: “Lautaro” in Diego de Ocaña, <i>Relación del viaje a Chile</i>	102
Table 6.1: Region - 18 th Century	154
Table 6.2: Denounces - Period - 18 th Century	155
Table 6.3: Reason of the Denouncement - 18 th Century	156
Table 6.4: 18 th Century	157
Map 11.1: The main locations of Anglican stations and Indigenous settlements in Paraguayan	254
Figure 11.1: “Indians of Paraguay”	256
Figure 11.2: “Riacho Fernández, mission station in Gran Chaco”	258
Figure 11.3: “Boy”	261
Figure 11.4: “Sports at feast, Chaco”	262

INTRODUCTION

MANUFACTURING OTHERNESS: MISSIONS AND INDIGENOUS CULTURES IN LATIN AMERICA

SERGIO BOTTA

The discovery of the New World offered European civilisation,¹ which was entering into the Early Modern Age, the chance to generate a process of circulation of its own cultural and religious values. This “spiritual conquest”² has no comparable precedents as regards geographical coverage or historical consequences on the construction of future global geopolitical equilibriums.³ The missionary orders played an all-important role during this “Westernisation of the world,”⁴ not only as the key players in the spread

¹ John H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New: 1492-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

² Robert Ricard, *La «conquête spirituelle» du Mexique. Essai sur l’apostolat et les méthodes missionnaires des ordres mendiants en Nouvelle-Espagne de 1523-24 à 1572* (Paris: Institut d’ethnologie, 1933).

³ Caroline Douki, Philippe Minard, “Histoire globale, histoires connectées: un changement d’échelle historiographique?,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 54-4bis, no. 5 (2007): 7-21; Serge Gruzinski, “Les mondes mêlés de la Monarchie catholique et autres «connected histories»,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 56, no. 1 (2001): 85-117; *Les quatre parties du monde: histoire d’une mondialisation* (Paris: La Martinière, 2004); *L’Aigle et le Dragon: Démesure européenne et mondialisation au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2012); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia,” *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997): 735-762; *Explorations in Connected History: From the Tagus to the Ganges* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁴ Serge Latouche, *L’occidentalisation du monde* (Bagneux: Numilog, 2005).

of Christian values, but also as mediators between different worlds.⁵ Indeed, missionary strategies and practices made it possible to impose the dominating culture's values and institutions on the vanquished peoples.⁶ At the same time, they also promoted the global circulation of new knowledge in the Modern Age⁷ and the creation of areas of negotiation between different cultures during this stage of "the global integration of space."⁸

The book we are presenting looks at the vast field of study concerning the history of missions from a specific viewpoint. Firstly, while being aware of the global dimension of the missionary phenomena, the book focuses on "local" processes, singling out specific case studies to be utilised for a more general reflection. On the other hand, it is not to be believed that this perspective is aimed at asserting itself as a reaction to the historiographical trends open to examining the intercultural processes that develop on a global level. If anything, it sets itself a clearly opposite goal: to refocus attention on the Indigenous cultures that the missionaries helped—and still help—bring to light in the field of Western history. Firstly, it is a question of showing—through a series of different cases—how Indigenous cultures succeeded in actively entering the areas of negotiation created by missionaries, producing their own cultural subjectivity—which

⁵ On missionaries as mediators, see Louise M. Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth. Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989); and Nicola Gasbarro, ed., *Le culture dei missionari* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2009).

⁶ See, for example, Pierre Duviols, *La lutte contre les religions autochtones dans le Pérou colonial; «l'extirpation de l'idolâtrie,» entre 1532 et 1660* (Lima: Institut français d'études andines, 1971); Juan Carlos Estenssoro Fuchs, *Del paganismo a la santidad: la incorporación de los indios del Perú al catolicismo, 1532-1750* (Lima: IFEA, Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Instituto Riva-Agüero, 2003); Osvaldo F. Pardo, *The Origins of Mexican Catholicism: Nahua Rituals and Christian Sacraments in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004); Nathan Wachtel, *La vision des vaincus: les Indiens du Pérou devant la conquête espagnole, 1530-1570* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

⁷ Charlotte de Castelnau-L'Estoile, Marie-Lucie Copete, Aliocha Maldavsky, and Ines G. Županov, eds., *Missions d'évangélisation et circulation des savoirs, XVIe-XVIIIe siècle* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2011); Peter van der Veer, ed., *Conversion to Modernities: the Globalization of Christianity* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁸ Charles H. Parker, *Global Interactions in the Early Modern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

makes each of the contexts where mediations were produced worthy of interest.

In this perspective, we believe that focus on the “local” dimension of missionary activities still boasts scientific productiveness and, for this reason, must recapture the attention of the social sciences with the aim of completing the process of “provincializing Europe”⁹ that would allow for full understanding of the historical and anthropological processes of globalisation.¹⁰ Therefore, it will be necessary to observe missionary activities not only as a stimulus for producing knowledge—in a perspective that once again risks seeing modernity exclusively from a European perspective—but also as an active agent in the historical and anthropological processes that led to the manufacture of an otherness. This process could be observed from two different points of view. On the one hand, Western civilisation was able to compare itself to the multiple “other” peoples it had to establish relations with. On the other hand, it could be observed from the point of view of Indigenous cultures which, in these areas of negotiation, found a possible expression for their own agency in the production and reproduction of their own identities.¹¹

As regards missionary strategies and practices, it will be clear how the relations with Indigenous peoples generated a radical reflection on the very notion of evangelisation that will often be examined in this book. This type of self-reflection, which began subsequent to contact with a humanity that seemed to have been excluded from the Christian message of salvation, forces scholars to take into account the feedback of the colonial processes which caused transformations for the missionaries themselves. Therefore, the history of Christian missions cannot but represent an all-important field of study for Americanistic scholars, since the missionaries’ forms of self-reflection encouraged experimentation in new forms of relations between cultures. Missionary work in Latin America helped construct new theoretical and practical models for an understanding of otherness, both at an intellectual level and at a political level. In this perspective, the book confides in cooperation among various disciplines—anthropology, history, sociology, etc.—in the hope that they can

⁹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

¹⁰ Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010);

¹¹ Fenella Cannell, ed., *The Anthropology of Christianity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); and Aparecida Vilaça and Robin Wright, eds., *Native Christians. Modes and Effects of Christianity among Indigenous Peoples of the Americas* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009).

be involved in the description of ways in which, when faced with the Indigenous diversity, the missions reformulated a Western image of the world and encouraged transformation of the *grilles conceptuelles*¹² used by European culture to examine ethnic, social, cultural and religious differences.¹³

As already pointed out, specific focus was placed on the relations established between missionary groups and the Indigenous groups examined. This focus made it possible to concentrate on the orthopraxical dimension of the “spiritual conquest”: given that missionary action was often focused on practical aspects—usually related to control of Indigenous behaviour—the book ended up, almost naturally, taking its distance from the dogmatic and theological dimension of missionary activities, which also represents a fertile area of investigation. As a result, one of the privileged places of focus in the various essays corresponds to the message and the forms of communication of Christianity which led missionaries to perceive the strategies of penetration and consolidation as processes of “adaptation” or “inculturation,” as places where missions produced a reflexion concerning the relations between dogmatic universalism and cultural relativism. This is why it was decided to also include essays dedicated to describing the response of Indigenous cultures to evangelisation processes. Indeed, paradoxically, the practical dimension of the missions offered resources for an Indigenous resistance to those devices that aimed to generate a “*colonisation de l’imaginaire*.”¹⁴

Despite the impossibility of describing the missionary phenomena in the Americas in full, the twelve articles comprising this book form an interesting *corpus* of documentary material and promote reflections originating from different theoretic and methodological backgrounds. Given the diversity of the situations examined, it was preferable to organise the essays in accordance with a chronological criterion, since classification by geographical and cultural areas would undoubtedly have proved unsatisfactory. Furthermore, the book’s aim was not to build an inter-American comparison between forms of Indigenous response to missionary strategies—which still remains to be built. The aim was simply

¹² Carmen Bernand and Serge Gruzinski, *De l’idolâtrie: une archéologie des sciences religieuses* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1988).

¹³ Serge Gruzinski and Nathan Wachtel, eds., *Le Nouveau Monde Mondes Nouveaux. L’expérience américaine* (Paris: Editions Recherches sur les Civilisations, Editions de l’Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1996).

¹⁴ Serge Gruzinski, *La colonisation de l’imaginaire: sociétés indigènes et occidentalisation dans le Mexique espagnol, XVIe-XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988).

to outline, in a preliminary manner, a scientific question still to be answered, in the hope of promoting new areas of debate. On the other hand, we hope that chronological organisation of material—albeit with large time intervals—can at least highlight the long-term quality of the phenomena looked at, and consequently the extraordinary and macroscopic importance of this field of academic study.

In conclusion, without stopping to consider the alternative between an apologetic and anti-apologetic interpretation when studying missionary activities—a feature of historiography that seems to have exhausted its own driving force—many of the articles have not renounced the possibility of “taking the part” of Indigenous peoples, hence asserting the key role of the moral location of academic studies.¹⁵

The book opens, for solely chronological reasons, with my essay entitled “Towards a Missionary Theory of Polytheism: The Franciscans in the face of the Indigenous Religions of New Spain,” which strives to identify—during the early years of colonial history in New Spain—debate and discussion aimed at creating a “theory of polytheism.” Said theory, in addition to rewriting the lexicon of interreligious meetings during the Early Modern Age, also ended up performing a socio-cultural function, as a place of production and re-production of the colonial religious field—site of the struggle with idolatry and the creation of a shared religiosity that generated the expressive forms of popular Catholicism in Latin America.

In the book’s second essay (“The Doctrine of Juli. Foundation, Development and the New Identity in a Shared Space”), Virginia Battisti Delia shifts the historical focus onto the Andes to consider the case of the Juli mission: a laboratory of missionary practices and strategies that was to have rebounding effects throughout the religious history of the whole continent. By analysing artistic production created with the aim of evangelising the Indigenous populations, the author focuses on the consequences of using images when making known the Christian message. Indeed, a new order emerges in Juli that seems to draw upon both cultures, where art loses its exclusively aesthetic function in order to become an area for manufacture of an otherness, of a new artistic style that presents itself as a shared code of communication: “Churches became a shared space to give life and shape to the new religion, which the Jesuits themselves seemed to promote: a Catholic religion, nevertheless charged at the same time with Native meanings.” (p. 29)

¹⁵ Ivan Strenski, *Religion in Relation: Method, Application, and Moral Location* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1993).

In the book's third essay ("Jesuits and Indians in the Borderlands. Vice-Royalty of Peru, 16th-18th Centuries"), Nikolai Rakutz uses the Juli experience as a basis to develop an investigation of the progress of missionary strategies in the Andes and, more generally, in South America. By showing how the process of consolidating the system of reductions was slow, conflicting and contradictory, the author succeeds in detailing the complexities of the mechanisms used to adapt forms of evangelisation to the changes in specific historical circumstances. What comes to light is how the episodic nature of the application of missionary strategies also results in the fact that "Christianisation did not lead to the total destruction of the traditional way of life" (p. 76).

The book's fourth essay also looks at the Jesuit approach to missionary activities ("Making the Indigenous Speak. The Jesuit Missionary Diego de Rosales in Colonial Chile, 17th Century") where Rafael Gaune, from an apparently less optimistic position, observes "ventriloqual powers" (p. 85) through which the Indigenous populations were used by colonial forces to create their own discourse: "the Indigenous voice was used to tell what the authors themselves were not able to say, or to say what they actually wanted to say" (p. 86). An analysis of the missionary work of Diego de Rosales in colonial Chile during the seventeenth century makes it possible to observe the rhetorical instruments—dialogues and monologues—that the Jesuits used "to enter into other cultures and then describe and reshape them" (p. 105). At the same time, when observing processes through which it is possible to "make the Indigenous speak," the contradictions and ambiguities of the missionary manufacture of otherness can be noted.

Therefore, if missionary debate seemed to be a device for the production of an image of the Indigenous cultures, at the same time it also contributed to creating national identities, as can be seen in the essay by Michel Kobelinski: "Negation and Exaltation of the sertanistas of São Paulo in the Discourses of Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix, D. José Vaissette and Gaspar da Madre de Deus (1756-1774)." Here, the actions of three missionary figures of the seventeenth century serve to investigate a fundamental part of Brazilian identity—"the cloak of superiority (excessive patriotism) that actually hides a complex of inferiority (resentment)" (p. 113)—that captured the attention of historians, anthropologists, psychologists and sociologists. While creating a progressive renovation of the image of the New World and its inhabitants, Charlevoix, Vaissette and Madre de Deus helped create the lexicon of a national debate that, involuntarily, generated a reflection on Indigenous qualities and sensitivity "as an instrument of struggle based on resentment caused by the loss of privileges

in the context of conflicts and negotiations related to society and identity.” (p. 132).

With the following essay, the historical focus (“Demonym Cartography: Native Peoples and Inquisition in Portuguese America - 18th Century”) takes a step forward, both from a chronological viewpoint and as regards the research methods looked at. Indeed, Maria Leônia Chaves de Resende follows the trajectory of the processes of the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in the historical and social context of the colonial world through the eyes of inquisition trials. Through careful reading of the documentary material produced during the eighteenth century—in the detailed relations with regional situations—the author shows how identities seem to be the product of negotiations between forms of self-definition and social recognition: “It is precisely in this complex relation that Indigenous identities are constantly rebuilt, from exchanged and cultural appropriations reproducing, recreating, and renewing themselves into the historical process” (p. 150).

In the book’s seventh essay (“Christian Bodies, Other Bodies: Processes of Conversion and Transformation in Northeastern Amazonia”), the methodology is developed in an anthropological perspective and pays attention to the most recent theoretical developments in studies of the Indigenous peoples of Amazonia. Indeed, the ethnographic approach makes it possible to observe the arrival of the missionaries and the establishment of the mission stations as a fundamental turning point in the lives of said Indigenous groups. Far from being interpreted in a doctrinal manner, the processes of conversion to Christianity are looked at starting from an Indigenous viewpoint as “a change experienced and located in the body” (p. 169). Therefore, the experience of the conversion of the Trio shows how a “chronic instability” of the Indigenous person offers the people of Amazonia a resource for interpreting the missionary experience in their own terms: “In an encounter of worldviews which generated a unique form of ‘controlled equivocation,’ both missionaries and Trio established a common project centred on the temporary suppression of the ‘fierce’ half of Trio identity in order to stabilise the ‘peaceful’ side” (p. 177).

The dialogic “experiment” proposed by Paride Bollettin also finds expression within the ethnographic context of Amazonia (“Indian Missionary or Pastor? Reflections on a Religious Trajectory in the Amazon”). The essay tells the story of a member of the Mebengokré community, absorbed in a process of definition of his own identity, at the crossroads represented by the alternatives presented among various possibilities of placement in the Christian religious field. Therefore, in this

manner, the figure of Kapoto becomes an interesting example of appropriation of the knowledge of the “whites” as an instrument for acquiring cards to be played in politics through the prestige linked to the opportunity for travel: “The passage from ‘minister’ to ‘missionary’ is configured as the possibility of opening a universe of new partners, both for the possible acquisition of new *kukradja*, and to have been elected as a mediator with the outside world, both the Indigenous and the ‘white’” (p. 197).

The following two essays are also set within a Brazilian context and shift the focus to an openly political level. The first essay (“The Indigenous Missionary Council: A Brazilian Experience between Culture and Faith”) by Marcos Pereira Rufino looks at the activities of the Conselho Indigenista Missionário (CIMI) as the undisputed ecclesiastical authority with regard to Indigenous politics and as a political player of key importance in relations with Brazilian society as a whole. It marks a radical turning point in the way in which the missionary world perceives cultural difference. Indeed, Rufino’s essay shows how the depletion of old categories such as the “oppressed,” “marginalised” or “excluded” identifies a new central role for CIMI in the reconstruction of Indigenous identities that becomes a political struggle focused on the defence of “collective rights.”

The essay by Sidnei Clemente Peres takes a similar direction (“Religious Conflicts, Missionary Action and Indigenous Activism in the Western Brazilian Amazon”), examining the role of the Salesians in the “tri-national frontier” area (Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela), where the missionaries act as vicarious agents of the State, preceding it in the nationalisation of the Indigenous masses, resulting in the religious language of “modernisation.” Even if, in this context, the Salesians also seem to perform a positive role in the assertion of ethnic and ancestral pride in the Rio Negro area, the unveiling of the missionary discursive strategies truly shows “the Church’s role as guardian of national sovereignty” (p. 225).

The essay by Alejandro Martínez (“Seeing is Believing? Vision and Indigenous Agency in the Anglican Evangelization of the Paraguayan Chaco”) closes the circle opened with the essay by Virginia Battisti Delia, examining once again the function of visual instruments in evangelisation, in this case with regard to the use of photography by Anglican missionaries who entered into contact with the Enxet people of the Paraguayan Chaco. In addition to acknowledging visual resources as effective instruments for evangelisation, Martínez offers an interesting Indigenous response to missionary policies: “Although the practice of

photography and the use of visual media was led by these missionaries' interests and expectancies and in spite of the fact that it was developed in the context of an asymmetric power relationship—between photographer/missionary and photographed/Indigenous person—, it was observed that neither photography production nor the reception of images projected by the magic lantern developed took place in a context of a simple imposition of Anglican interests" (p. 261).

Lastly, the book comes to an end with a brief essay by Valéria Nely César de Carvalho ("The Hidden Heritage") that highlights a problem of political management in the process of acknowledging Indigenous rights and of transforming their cultural patrimony into museum exhibits in the contemporary context. Therefore, the essay demonstrates the pressing modernity of the debate regarding relations between missions and Indigenous cultures in Latin America: "The *indios* [...] must decode the symbols that, whether they wish it or not, have been transformed into a code giving access to their rights, and they must perforce participate in the re-definition of the nature of the ethnographic museum in the process of re-appropriating their cultural patrimony. In short, the Coppi Collection constitutes a valid subject that allows for discussion of the ideas as to how the colonial encounter with the 'other' need not end in the annihilation of the identity of the 'other'" (p. 272).

Whenever you have the luck to work on the publication of a collective volume, human and intellectual debts are made to the scholars who, knowingly and/or unknowingly, donated their own energy and work. The reward in terms of knowledge and experience always prevails over the onerous task of coordination in order to complete the collective work. In this case, I also had the chance to learn a great deal from the scholars that contributed to this project. Therefore, I firstly offer my most heartfelt thanks to those who took part in a symposium ("Misiones y culturas indígenas en América Latina") held during the VI CEISAL Congress (Consejo Europeo de Investigaciones Sociales de América Latina), held in Toulouse (France) on 2 and 3 July, 2010. A special thank you goes to Valéria Nely César de Carvalho, who helped me conceive of the symposium and coordinate part of the preparation. Given that she was unable to take part in the symposium for personal reasons, I am happy that Valeria was able to contribute an article that brings the book to a close with an up-to-date research proposal. I would also like to personally thank the speakers who, while not having had the possibility to contribute to this

book, were involved in the symposium, making it possible to develop a productive discussion. Therefore my thanks go to Pilar Máñez, Jimena Obregón Iturra, Benita Herreros Cleret de Langavant, Marie Morel and Marta Rosa Amoroso for their commitment to the project.

I must also personally thank the speakers at a seminar (“L’impresa missionaria nel continente americano: contributi di antropologia, storia e storia delle religioni”) that I coordinated between 2007 and 2011 within the International Americanistic Studies Congress, held every year in Perugia thanks to the “Centro Studi Americanistici - Circolo Amerindiano”: the essays by Nikolai Rakutz and Maria Leônia Chaves de Resende originated from this working group and seemed to be complementary to those produced during the symposium held in France.

Special thanks go to my colleagues and friends of the Religious Studies section of the Department of History, Cultures and Religions of the Sapienza University of Rome with whom I have shared projects, ideas and work over the years, always in the hope of promoting research in a country such as Italy that is experiencing a serious, possibly irreversible economic and cultural crisis. Lastly, I would especially like to thank the few, yet passionate Italian scholars of Americanistic Studies; these include many to whom I am indebted for scientific stimuli; I have a special friendship with Davide Domenici and Alessandro Lupo, whom I would like to thank for their constant support.

In any case, this book would never have seen the light without Valentina, to whom I lovingly dedicate every small fruit of my daily efforts.

CHAPTER ONE

TOWARDS A MISSIONARY
THEORY OF POLYTHEISM:
THE FRANCISCANS IN THE FACE
OF THE INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS
OF NEW SPAIN

SERGIO BOTTA

Introduction

At the beginning of the Modern Age, the notion of idolatry dominated European debate on religious alterity.¹ Specifically, idolatry seems to have acted on various levels since the discovery of the Americas: on a theological level, it acted as a cognitive device able to provide an explanation of Indigenous religious “diversity” and hence to neutralise the potentially scandalous value of the ethnographic accounts that reached Europe from the New World.² Meanwhile on a political level, the

¹ On the history of idolatry, see: Jonathan Sheehan, “Thinking about Idols in Early Modern Europe,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 4 (2006): 561-570; Carina L. Johnson, “Idolatrous Cultures and the Practice of Religion,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 4 (2006): 597-622; Francis Schmidt, “Polytheisms: Degeneration or progress?,” in *The Inconceivable Polytheism: Studies in Religious Historiography* (History & Anthropology, v. 3), ed. Francis Schmidt (London-Paris-New York: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1987), 9-60; Stephen C. Barton, ed., *Idolatry. False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism, and Christianity*, (London-New York: T&T Clarke, 2007).

² On ethnographic and travel accounts, see Joan-Pau Rubiés, “Theology, Ethnography, and the Historicization of Idolatry,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 4 (2006): 571-596; Jas Elsner and Joan-Pau Rubiés, eds., *Voyages and Visions: Towards a Cultural History of Travel* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999); Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*

accusation of idolatry with regard to Indigenous beliefs and practices legitimised those social actions that guaranteed control of the conquered cultures.³ Therefore, as regards the mechanisms of this cognitive and political link, we can note how New Spain represented a perfect laboratory for observing the instruments that promoted the expansion of Christianity. Indeed, this was the area where Europeans encountered multifaceted civilisations, the military and spiritual conquest of which required complex devices in order to dominate them. The debate regarding the nature of Indigenous religious systems during the sixteenth century was led by missionary orders, and in particular by the Franciscans who, during the early colonial history, exploited a key political position in New Spain in order to impose their own interpretative model on the observation of Indigenous cultures.⁴

Our first objective is to analyse the colonial function of debate generated by the Franciscan order regarding the plurality of deities worshipped by Indigenous cultures. Hence the title of this paper—which

(Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964).

³ “Idolatry is and has always been a charge made against someone else, a language of judgment used at certain times and for certain effects. But it was a potent charge”: Sheehan, “Thinking about Idols in Early Modern Europe,” 564.

⁴ Concerning Franciscan activity in New Spain, see Georges Baudot, *Utopie et Histoire au Mexique. Les premiers chroniqueurs de la civilisation mexicaine (1520-1569)* (Toulouse: Editions E. Privat, 1976); *La pugna franciscana por México* (México: Alianza Editorial Mexicana, Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1990); Charles Braden, *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1930); Christian Duverger, *La conversión de los indios de Nueva España* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1974); José María Kobayashi, *La educación como conquista (empresa franciscana en México)* (México: El Colegio de México, 1974); Francisco Morales, ed., *Franciscan Presence in the Americas. Essays on the Activities of the Franciscan Friars in The Americas, 1492-1900* (Potomac: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1983); Elsa Cecilia Frost, *La historia de Dios en las Indias. Visión franciscana del Nuevo Mundo* (México: Tusquets Editores, 2002); José Antonio Maravall, “La utopía político-religiosa de los franciscanos en Nueva España,” *Estudios Americanos* 2 (1949): 199-227; John Leddy Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World* (London-Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970); Robert Ricard, *La conquête spirituelle du Mexique. Essai sur l’apostolat et les méthodes missionnaires des ordres mendiants en Nouvelle-Espagne de 1523-24 à 1572* (Paris: Institut d’Ethnologie, 1933); Luis Weckmann, “Las esperanzas milenaristas de los franciscanos de la Nueva España,” *Historia Mexicana* 33, no. 1 (1982): 89-105.

makes reference to the existence of a “theory of polytheism”⁵—is deliberately paradoxical. Indeed, it is obvious how, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, a systematic theory on the plurality of gods could still not be singled out since the first records of use of the term in the Modern Age can only be found in the work by Jean Bodin, *De la Démonomanie des Sorciers*, published in France in 1580.⁶ In addition to this, a real interpretative model, which represented a kind of theory of religion *ante litteram*, was only formulated some decades later. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that the term had already been invented in the first century BC within a Jewish-Alexandrian setting where it had been used for the first time in *De decalogo* of Philo of Alexandria.⁷ In his work, Philo spoke of a *polytheia* (from the Greek πολὺς and θεοί) to defend the uniqueness of the Jewish God from the threat represented by the plurality of Greek deities. The original notion of polytheism put forward by Philo was a follow-on from the notion of idolatry which, in the same multicultural environment, had been examined in the Book of Wisdom. The latter was excluded from the Hebrew Bible canon before later being included in the Septuagint translation, becoming a part of the Christian canonical tradition. As has been mentioned, it was the concept of idolatry, albeit at different times in history, that steered the comparison between the Jewish-Christian world and “other” forms of religion.⁸ This took place until, after centuries of oblivion, the anti-Catholic debate was ignited that was also voiced in the works of the authors of the first theoretical observations on polytheism: these included the aforementioned work by Bodin and, above all, the *Natural History of Religion* by David Hume,⁹ which in 1757 provided the scientific foundations of a theory of religion where polytheism played a key role.¹⁰

⁵ For an updated theory of polytheism, see Burkhard Gladigow, “Polytheismus und Monotheismus. Zur historischen Dynamik einer europäischen Alternative,” in *Polytheismus und Monotheismus in den Religionen des Vorderen Orients*, ed. Manfred Krebern timer and Jürgen von Oorschot (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002), 3-20.

⁶ Jean Bodin, *De la démonomanie des sorciers* (Paris: I. Du Puys, 1580).

⁷ See Mark S. Smith, *God in Translation. Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

⁸ Schmidt, “Polytheisms: Degeneration or progress?,” 9-60.

⁹ David Hume, *Four dissertations. I. The natural history of religion. II. Of the passions. III. Of tragedy. IV. Of the standard of taste* (London: Printed for A. Millar, 1757).

¹⁰ Francis Schmidt, “Naissance des polythéismes (1624-1757),” *Archives des sciences sociales des religions* 59, no. 1 (1985): 77-90.

So, it has been pointed out on several occasions how this key notion of historical and religious lexicon appeared as an oppositive category, in other words created in an intellectual environment with the aim of defining the religions of different people, but also of formulating a critical instrument with regard to the “polytheist” and “idolatric” nature of Catholicism in the midst of the debate with Protestantism.¹¹ The philosophical movement of English deists had also given rise to a process of diminution of biblical authority which, paradoxically, took its strength from the confrontation with the plurality of other religions; hence, the “relativism” introduced by deist critics generated a gradual destructuring of the notion of idolatry—and also of its judgemental value. Indeed, it was able to generate, through the use of comparison, a “neutral” category (or, at least, one that appeared less entangled in ideological processes), polytheism, susceptible to distancing other cultures from the control of theological judgement in order to expose them, in the future of religious sciences, to examination free from religious prejudice.¹²

Hence it is clear how, in these conditions, the construction of a “science of religions”¹³ took the form of an internal question of Christianity, as a result of the stripping of substance from theological requirements unable to provide a suitable device for the comprehension and control of a radically different religious and political condition, both inside and outside Christian civilization. Even if the importance of the question within Christianity cannot be denied, I feel that the effects of retroaction between the core and the edge of the Christian world throughout the Modern Age must be taken into account. In keeping with the views voiced by Ivan Strenski¹⁴ and Guy Stroumsa,¹⁵ I feel that the exit from the biblical type of interpretation was not only the result of an internal crisis, but also reflected a crisis outside of Christianity: in other words, it was the result of the discovery of the diversity of religions during the age of geographical exploration. Hence, it is clear how the example of New Spain represents a highly interesting case study due to its unique historical and geographical characteristics. Indeed, Franciscans made an

¹¹ Carlos M.N. Eire, *The War against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

¹² Peter Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism* (London: Routledge 1989).

¹³ Philippe Borgeaud, *Aux origines de l'histoire des religions* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

¹⁴ Ivan Strenski, *Thinking about Religion. An Historical Introduction to Theories of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell 2006).

¹⁵ Guy G. Stroumsa, *A New Science. The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

all-important contribution to the reformulation of the notion of idolatry and to the development of innovative reflection regarding the plurality of extra-human entities worshipped by Indigenous populations that paved the way for a future theory of polytheism.

So, the goal of this paper is two-fold: on the one hand, it tries to place historical and religious focus on processes traditionally viewed as marginal within religious studies; processes which even managed to make a marked contribution to the development of a mainstream reflection while constructing the modern sphere of religious debate. Indeed, as regards the history of the New World, we can see an underestimation of the first stages of the colonial debate that paid witness to the existence of clear signs of a change in the European imagination. Even if this question cannot be looked at in great detail, I feel that study of missionary writings can help reflect on the conditions for a theory of polytheism. As far as this is concerned, it may be useful to establish a dialogue with the “sceptic” perspective within Mesoamerican studies that has questioned at length the possibility of applying the polytheistic notion of divinity to analysis of this historical and religious context.¹⁶ Secondly, we can hope for an interpretation of the colonial debate developed during the Early Modern Period which, thanks to careful acknowledgement of the plurality of religious systems, makes it possible to reconsider with greater awareness the “conventional pact” which helped make said theory of polytheism useable in comparative terms.¹⁷ In other words, the lexicon which missionaries proposed during New Spain’s early colonial history needs to

¹⁶ In Mesoamerican studies there survives a “critical” or “sceptical” position concerning the possibility of using the polytheistic notion of deity. For a synthesis of this debate, see Enrique Florescano, “Sobre la naturaleza de los dioses de Mesoamérica,” *Estudios de cultura náhuatl* 27 (1997): 41-67. Among the most stimulating works there figures the analysis of Alfredo López Austin, “Nota sobre la fusión y la fisión de los dioses en el panteón mexica,” *Anales de Antropología* 20, no. 2 (1983): 75-87, and, in Mayan studies, the reflections of Karl A. Taube, *The Major Gods of Ancient Yucatan* (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1992). Also seeking to set forth a new interpretative hypothesis are: Elizabeth Hill Boone, *Incarnations of the Aztec Supernatural: The Image of Huitzilopochtli in Mexico and Europe* (Philadelphia: Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, 1989); Doris Heyden, “Las diosas del agua y la vegetación,” *Anales de Antropología* 20, no. 2 (1983): 129-145; and Luis Reyes García, “Dioses y escritura pictográfica,” *Arqueología Mexicana* 23, no. 4 (1997): 24-33.

¹⁷ See, for example, from the perspective of Religious Studies: Bruce Lincoln, “Nature and Genesis of Pantheons,” in *Gods and Demons. Critical Explorations in the History of Religions* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 17-29.

be looked at first of all in order to identify the specific characteristics of Mesoamerican polytheism. To this end, I will examine Franciscan thinking only; firstly to limit the field of study, but also to single out a line of continuity and sharing of common theological principles within their sphere of interpretation. Lastly, I will look exclusively at the development of some theoretical statements—implicit or explicit—proposed during the first century of New Spain’s colonial history by three of the most important representatives of the Franciscan order: Toribio de Benavente Motolinía, Bernardino de Sahagún and Juan de Torquemada. I will try to outline the emergence of independent thinking on the nature of Mesoamericans gods which sprang from retrieval of the ancient Christian interpretation regarding paganism. Therefore, a colonial notion of divinity will come to light as a “dialogic” object, as the result of comparison between different religious systems and as a device aimed at encouraging the inclusion of Indigenous diversity in a global system of representation of culture differences at the beginning of the Modern Age.

Indigenous Gods as Expressions of Nature

The work of the Franciscan Toribio de Benavente Motolinía represents an excellent point of departure for an analysis of these unique writings.¹⁸ Indeed, his missionary activity took place during the first part of New Spain’s history (Motolinía was part of the famous expedition of *doce* which landed in Mexican territory for the first time in 1524) and hence is especially stimulating for observation of the first part of the “lexicon of comparison” which was to become increasingly complicated and complex as missionary activities developed. The precocity of Motolinía’s work had major consequences for beliefs regarding Indigenous religiosity since his writings appeared to be heavily influenced by the optimism that characterised the first phase of missionary activities. As regards the nature

¹⁸ Motolinía’s work has stimulated much scholarly discussion. For a reconstruction of its structure and contents, Edmundo O’Gorman’s reflections are particularly useful; see *fray* Toribio de Benavente Motolinía, *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España*, ed. Edmundo O’Gorman (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1958); *Memoriales o Libro de las cosas de la Nueva España y de los naturales de ella*, ed. Edmundo O’Gorman (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1971); *Libro perdido, ensayo de reconstrucción de la obra histórica extraviada de Fray Toribio*, ed. Edmundo O’Gorman (México: CONACULTA, 1989). See also Sergio Botta, “El politeísmo como sistema de traducción. La obra misionera de Toribio de Benavente Motolinía frente a la alteridad religiosa de la Nueva España,” *Guaraguao. Revista de Cultura Latinoamericana* 28 (2008): 9-26.

of Indigenous deities, Motolinía put forward a simple yet extremely coherent interpretative model from a theological viewpoint. His observations did not seem to be the result of an “ethnographic” type of reply that we could define as interested in a description of “emic” values of Indigenous cultures, but rather a retrospective dialogue with the Christian literary tradition.¹⁹ Colonial events were interpreted by Motolinía through a providential historical model which identified in New Spain’s history the re-opening of the confrontation between the Christian “truth” and idolaters’ “errors.”

After offering a lengthy description of the idolatric elements still found in all Indian villages after almost two decades of Christian domination, Motolinía explained to European readers in his *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España* the reasons for the need for “spiritual conquest” through analogy with the biblical account of the ten plagues of Egypt.²⁰ In this way, the Franciscan offered a clear theology of history that achieved the result of nullifying the scandal generated by the emergence of a plurality of cultures: indeed, by establishing an ideal link with the history of Israel, Motolinía perceived colonial history in the sense of an eternal fight against the devil and hence, against a “universal” form of religious disorder. Consequently, the first problem Motolinía had to deal with was a possible classification of the populations of New Spain within a Christian model of interpreting religious diversity. In his *Epistola proemial*, after a lengthy study of Indigenous history, Motolinía stated that the *naturales* of New Spain had to be looked on as pagans. In his opinion—and contrary to what many seemed to affirm during the early years of New Spain’s colonial history—the Natives of Mesoamerica could not be considered as part of the generation of Moors, nor as part of the Jews.²¹ This statement, offered at

¹⁹ “Yet while ancient arguments and beliefs about idols were reiterated in Peru, their effect was not quite what it had been in Europe. Besides, the arguments shifted and changed in the new context. There is also the question, did these arguments ever achieve any-thing beyond imposing European ideas and cognitive models on the Andean world? Or did they succeed in touching upon some aspects at least of Andean religious practice and belief?”: Sabine MacCormack, “Gods, Demons, and Idols in the Andes,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 4 (2006): 624.

²⁰ “Hirió Dios y castigó esta tierra, y a los que en ella se hallaron, así naturales como extranjeros, con diez plagas trabajosas”: Toribio de Benavente Motolinía, *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España*, ed. Claudio Esteva Fabregat (Madrid: Dastin, 2001), 69.

²¹ “Algunos españoles, considerados ciertos ritos y costumbres destos naturales, júzganlos y dicen que son de generación de moros; otros por algunas causas y rrazones y condiciones que en ellos ven, dizen que estos indios son y deçienden de

the start of his work, demonstrated above all the urgent need for “classification” that seemed to torment the European imagination. Moreover, the decision to place Indigenous cultures in the category of pagans made it possible to implement, albeit in a decontextualized historical condition, the arguments used against ancient paganisms during Christian history. Said solution most certainly fulfilled a cognitive function, but also catered to a political need: indeed, the “American pagans” could be looked on as guiltless since the fact that they had had no revelation of Christianity meant they were still “in need” of a message of salvation.

The first major question of Christian anti-pagan literature to reappear in Motolinía’s writings concerned the infinite plurality of idols: to his eyes, they appeared to be inexhaustible in number, hidden in all corners and made of the most diverse materials.²² The problem was tackled by Motolinía without having to reach a compromise with the Indigenous forms of organisation of knowledge and represented a re-affirmation of the programmatic refusal of divine plurality which characterised the entire Christian tradition in similar literary forms. Indeed, according to Motolinía, the Mesoamerican religion was not organised on the basis of a different order of meanings, but was the product of an error of perspective which Christianity was already familiar with since it had fought against it during the first centuries of its history. In the fourth chapter of the first essay of his *Historia*, the Franciscan offered a collection of Mesoamerican idolatry which showed the total lack of all ethnographic and cognitive interest: an inventory of idolatry was presented without any attempt to identify an organisational principle; the numerous Indigenous religious expressions were grouped together in a single, disorganised, omnicomprehensive category. It almost seemed as if, in the eyes of the missionary, it was pointless to look for a coherent order in the Indigenous vision of the world.²³ Despite idolatry seeming to be an inexhaustible

generación de judíos. La mayor parte y principal afirma que estos naturales son puros gentiles, y esta es la más común opinión y parece ser mas verdadera”: Toribio de Benavente Motolinía, *Memoriales (Libro de oro, MS JGI 31)*, ed. Nancy J. Dyer (México: Colegio de México, 1996), 131.

²² “De como escondían los ydolos y en que lugares tenían su adoración, y de la materia y forma que los hazían los quales eran ynnumerables. [...] No los podían agotar o acabar porque tenían ydolos de piedra y de palo y de barro”: Motolinía, *Memoriales*, 155-156.

²³ “Los indigenas poseen ídolos innumerables, que habitan muchos lugares: están en los templos, en los corrales, en los bosques, en las montañas, a lo largo de los caminos; están también cerca del agua, en las fuentes, en los árboles, en las

phenomenon, when the writings took a closer look at the individual Native deities, the Franciscan made use of an interpretative model which clearly referred back to the Western literary tradition. Indeed at the start of his brief essay on Indigenous gods, Motolinía asserted that they acknowledged fire, air, water and earth as divinities.²⁴ In this case, the reference to the framework of the four elements of nature performed a dual function: on the one hand, it promoted a first, elementary selection and classification of the Indigenous deities; on the other the interpretative model took on the form of a “judgement” and provided a clear explanation of the nature of the Indigenous error. The missionary proposed to explain the deities as forms of improper personification and deification of nature; in other words, it was proof of the Indigenous populations’ inability to distinguish the creator from his creatures which generated the breach from the substantiating hierarchy of Christian values. Therefore, from our viewpoint, another element of great interest comes to light: indeed, the use of the naturist model also seems to be the result of duplication of an interpretative model rooted in Old Testament tradition and apologetic literature. As already mentioned, the core of anti-idolatric arguments can be traced back to the Book of Wisdom. The essay found in chapters 13 to 15 offers a collection of the various forms of idolatric error: the adoration of natural phenomena and stars, the adoration of idols, the euhemeristic theory that explains the origin of the adoration of great men and dead rulers, and lastly the adoration of animals. This Jewish-Alexandrian model immediately generated a *topos* of the anti-pagan debate which was also taken up by Philo of Alexandria in the *de Decalogo*, hence also exercising a marked influence on the observations which led to creation of the term polytheism. While at a Christian level, the content of the Book of Wisdom became, for example, part of the Apology of Aristides of Athens,²⁵ where the interpretative model was developed in a direction which could provocatively be defined as “proto-evolutionist.” In Aristides’ model, the different errors of idolaters were classified in accordance with the same

encrucijadas, en los barrios y en los oratorios. Están hechos de piedra, de semillas, etcétera; son grandes, pequeños, medios; pueden representar hombres, mujeres, bestias feroces, serpientes, pájaros, águilas, tigres; el sol, la luna, la estrella, los peces grandes, hasta las ranas y los sapos”: Motolinía, *Historia*, 86-87.

²⁴ “Tenían por dioses al fuego y al ayre y al agua y a la tierra”: Motolinía, *Memoriales*, 156.

²⁵ See Aristide di Atene, *Apologia*, ed. Carlotta Alpignano (Firenze: Nardini Editore, 1988) and Giuliano Gliozzi, “The Apostles in the New World: Monotheism and Idolatry between Revelation and Fetishism,” in *The Inconceivable Polytheism*, 123-148.

quadripartite model of the Book of Wisdom, but had a precise historical and geographical distribution since they were assigned to four types of ideal populations. The truth of Christian monotheism can be found at the top of the evolutionary model describing religious diversity, outside the idolatric dimension, while at the bottom of the pyramid we can find the religion of barbarians that worship natural elements. The forms of error found in the religion of the Greeks, who worship human beings themselves, follows on from this in the progressive model of the development of idolatry. Lastly, at a higher level, we can find the Jews who, even if they worship only one God, have not achieved a knowledge of the truth comparable to that of Christianity.

Hence, the explicit use of the Christian apologetic argument at the start of Motolinía's work is interesting since it shows, from a missionary viewpoint, the basic error of all Indian idolatries: the incorrect adoration of creation instead of the creator itself. At the same time, at the beginning of an era during which contact between different worlds multiplied, this model offered Motolinía a simple yet effective classification of the populations encountered on the basis of a religious criterion: the problem of difference was thus resolved through generalisation of a theological way of thinking, making it possible to "translate" the systems of Indigenous values into a simple, special expression of a universal error.

Comparison with Ancient Times

The application of this basic interpretative model was soon to prove inadequate to guarantee the colonial control of complex cultures such as those of Mesoamerica. Specifically, the naturist model put forward by Motolinía immediately showed its inability to satisfy the urgent taxonomic need that characterised this historical period. Indeed, the selection of Indigenous gods, organised around the ordering principle of the four elements of nature, soon proved insufficient to contain the complexity of the Indigenous religious systems slowly coming to light.²⁶ With the passing of decades, the Franciscans' missionary activities had to deal more and more with the plurality of Indigenous beliefs and practices. This is the reason why it was also necessary to develop more in-depth "ethnographic" knowledge that would make it possible to promote the definitive

²⁶ James Lockhart, *Nahuas after the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

eradication of Indigenous idolatry. The work of Bernardino de Sahagún,²⁷ the complexity of which extends beyond the limits of this paper, appeared to be a direct product of this new socio-cultural condition. Indeed, the Franciscan, who arrived in New Spain in 1529, was the main actor in the second ethnographic surge that seemed to be a need that could not be put off from the second half of the sixteenth century on. Scarred by the cognitive failure of the first ethnographic phase—of which Motolinia and Andrés de Olmos were the leading exponents—the Franciscans came up with new methods and instruments to encourage in-depth knowledge of the Indigenous cultures. These included the famous paedagogical experiment of the Colegio Imperial de la Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, of which Sahagún was one of the main sponsors. The pages of the so-called *Coloquios de los Doce* show the profound change in the temperament of the Franciscan mission which was experiencing a less brilliant period of pastoral activity.²⁸ Sahagún, with the assistance of some of the school's brightest Indigenous pupils, compiled said work in 1564 as a retrospective reflection on the first encounter on a theological level between Christians and Indigenous populations which had taken place in 1524. A refined rhetoric made it possible to enact, in these extraordinary pages of New Spanish colonial literature, the presumed victory of the Christian theological horizon over the Indigenous peoples' paganism forty years after the start of the missions. This work, putting aside its numerous stratifications, clearly expressed a wish rather than concrete historical facts. Indeed it also contained a warning for the future generations of missionaries not to lower their guard in the development of the then still incomplete extirpation of idolatry.

²⁷ On Bernardino de Sahagún, see Munro Edmonson, ed., *Sixteenth Century Mexico. The Work of Sahagún* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974); Jorge J. Klor De Alva, Henry B. Nicholson, Eloise Quiñones Keber, eds., *The Work of Bernardino de Sahagún. Pioneer Ethnographer of Sixteenth-Century Aztec Mexico* (Albany: University of Albany, Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, 1988); Miguel León-Portilla, *Bernardino de Sahagún. Pionero de la antropología* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1999); Miguel León-Portilla, ed., *Bernardino de Sahagún. Quinientos años de presencia* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2002).

²⁸ Bernardino de Sahagún, *Coloquios y doctrina cristiana: con que los doce frailes de San Francisco, enviados por el papa Adriano VI y por el emperador Carlos V, convirtieron a los indios de la Nueva España ... : los diálogos de 1524, dispuestos por fray Bernardino de Sahagún y sus colaboradores, Antonio Valeriano ...*, ed. Miguel León Portilla (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Fundación de Investigaciones Sociales, 1986).

Therefore the fact that, within the changed socio-political climate, Sahagún had included a need to generate knowledge inspired by practical purposes into his literary offerings was no mere coincidence. There is a quantity of material in his more clearly “ethnographic” works that cannot be equalled over the course of the history of New Spain. However, the highly detailed descriptions of Indigenous gods in *Códice florentino* is not be viewed so much as the product of a different theological interpretation of Indigenous religions, but rather as the product of an evolution of missionary strategies.²⁹ As is well known, material focusing on the ancient Indigenous gods was grouped together in Book I of Sahagún’s encyclopaedia. A careful study of this extraordinary source cannot be performed herein. However, it is interesting to note how, from our viewpoint, Sahagún’s proposal represents an early sign of the crisis of modern applicability of the Book of Wisdom’s model which had, instead, dominated the model put forward by Motolinía. Indeed, even if the Franciscan opened his *confutación de la idolatría*, found in the Appendix to Book I, with a lengthy Latin quotation taken from the Book of Wisdom, it is clear that in the work’s overall economy it was only a rhetorical argument aimed at legitimising the Franciscan’s pastoral project.³⁰ Indeed, the concise comparison with Indigenous material made Sahagún appear to be forced to extend the collection of exegetical instruments previously used by Franciscans in the laborious quest for an effective interpretative model that allowed for Indigenous practices to be wiped out. Sahagún added numerous instruments which had formed the lexicon of the Jewish-

²⁹ Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, ed. Charles E. Dibble, Arthur J.O. Anderson (Santa Fe: University of Utah, 1950-1982).

³⁰ “Síguese de aquí claramente que Huitzilopochtli, no es dios, ni tampoco Tláloc, ni tampoco Quetzalcóatl; Cihuacóatl no es diosa, Chicomecóatl no es diosa, Teteuinnan no es diosa, Tzapotlatena no es diosa, Cihuateteo no son diosas, Chalchiuhtlicue no es diosa, Huixtocihuatl no es diosa, Tlazultéotl no es diosa, Xiuhtecuhtli no es diosa; Macuixúchitl o Xuchipilli no es dios, Umácatl no es dios, Ixtlilton no es dios, Opuchtli no es dios, Xipe Tótec no es dios, Yiacatecuhtli no es dios, Chicunquiahuitl no es dios, Chalmeacahuatl no es diosa, Acxomúcuil no es dios, Náxixtl no es dios, Cochimetl no es dios, Yacapitzáhuac no es dios, Nappatecuhtli no es dios, tepictoton no son dioses, el Sol, ni la Luna, ni la Tierra, ni la Mar, ni ninguno de todos los otros que adorábades no es dios; todos son demonios. Así lo testifica la Sagrada Escritura diciendo: omnes dii gentium demonia. Quiere decir: ‘Todos los dioses de los gentiles son demonios’”: Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, ed. Alfredo López Austin and Josefina García Quintana (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1988), 68.